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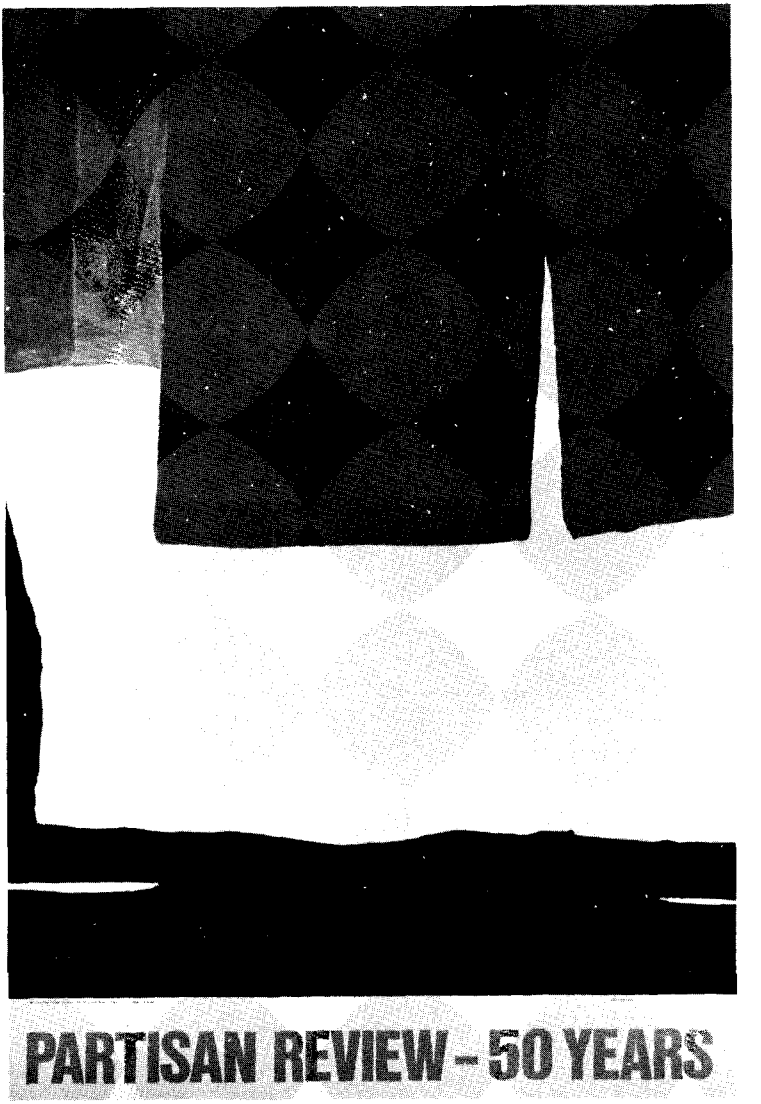


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# FICTION

## Michel Tournier

## THE FETISHIST

*(He appears at the back of the center aisle and makes his way up it toward the stage. He keeps darting anxious glances over his shoulder, then seems reassured and, smiling at the audience, tells them):*

It's all right. They trust me. They're having a drink at the . . . *(name of a bar near the theater).* They've given me an hour. I took advantage of it to do a little shopping. *(Sending a glance around him.)* There's some classy people here! Some beautiful dresses! I like that. It reassures me. It's polite. It's nice. It's gratifying.

*(He hauls himself up onto the stage. Hangs his hat on a peg.)*

And then, it's healthy to be dressed up! Healthy people are well dressed. The doctor says, "Undress!"—and that's it. You're already different. You're on your way to being lost. He—naturally, the swine—*he* is still dressed. Overdressed, even, in his white overall buttoned up to his chin. The patient is standing there looking ridiculous, with his suspenders hanging down, his pants corkscrewed over his shoes, his shirttails flapping. "All right, you can get dressed!" Then it's okay. But there are some cases, some patients, who don't ever get dressed. Never again! The psychiatric hospital is full of men and women who've never gotten dressed again. They mosey around in combat uniform, in jammies, in straitjackets, in their nightshirts. But none of those are real clothes. They don't cling to the skin. Real clothes cling, they're solid, they're like armor. My pals in the asylum, though, for the merest nothing, pff!, they get their so-called clothes taken off them, there's nothing left of them,. the patients are stark naked when they go for an examination, to take a shower, to bed, for shock treatment. Ooh, shock treatment! There's a fellow near me, he

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has false teeth. They make him take them out for his shock treatment! As if they were afraid he'd bite! They might just as well put a muzzle on him, while they're about it!

*(He examines the audience, shading his eyes with his hand, and picks out a young woman.)*

No, it's not true! Could it be you, my darling, my Antoinette? You can't see a thing with these lights.

*(He steps down into the house. Stops in front of a woman. Looks at her for a long time.)*

No no, of course not. That would really have been too extraordinary.

*(He goes back onto the stage.)*

It's twenty years, do you realize? But I'm patient. I'm still waiting for her. Because she's the only one who can get me out of that hole. Every time I leave it it's as if I'd gone to look for her. The last time she came to see me . . . *(Long silence.)* The day before, the medical director sent for me. I wondered what on earth he wanted with me. He said, "Martin, we've known each other a long time now, and there's one point we're agreed on, isn't there? You are perfectly healthy." Me, "Oh yes, I do feel well, except that I may perhaps be starting a little cold." "No, I mean mentally—you aren't ill?" "Me? Mentally ill? Well really, doctor, if *you* say so!" "No, well, what I mean is, we understand you, you're delicate, very highly-strung, and then you certainly have bizarre tastes, but you aren't what is commonly called mad."

How about that! Only I thought he was going to let me out! It even scared me a little, at first. Because in the long run, obviously, you get out of the habit of the wide open spaces, you can't quite imagine yourself outside again, with responsibilities and all that! But then the director reassured me, he even told me something that gave me such enormous, tremendous, colossal pleasure that I nearly wept. No, I actually did weep. He told me, "I'm talking to you like this because Madame Martin is coming to visit you tomorrow—yes, your wife." So then I wasn't scared anymore. I said to myself, she's coming to fetch me. They're letting me out, but she's going to look after

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me, she's going to protect me. And then the director said, "She will be coming with her lawyer." At that, obviously, I winced. A lawyer. What for? The director went on, "So you are of sound mind. Your signature is valid. Then this is what your former wife, well, your wife, wants. She wants to marry again. And to do that, obviously she has to get a divorce first. If you were ill, I mean mentally ill, mad, as you might say, well, it would be impossible. The law is against it. When one of the spouses is insane, the other cannot obtain a divorce. But you aren't mad, Martin, we're agreed on that point, aren't we?" Not mad, not when it came to losing Antoinette. But mad enough to stay locked up. I was losing all along the line! The next day I refused to go to the director's office. I told them I'd sign anything they liked with my eyes closed, anything at all, even my death warrant if that was what they wanted. But I didn't want to see anyone. In the end I did see the lawyer in the common room. I signed, and signed, and signed all the papers he'd brought in his briefcase. It was all over. No more Antoinette. Well, the new Antoinette, the one I didn't know, the one who never wanted to see me again, that one had disappeared, yes, forever. The other one, the previous one, the one who belongs to our good years, she still exists . . . here. *(He taps his heart.)*

Antoinette. . . . When I first knew her she was sixteen. I was nineteen. Our families were neighbors. We saw each other almost every day. But I was shy. She scared me. And yet I finally managed to approach her. One Sunday morning, I was just going out, and I saw her on the sidewalk. She was all in white. She must have been going to Mass. She dropped a glove. I ran and picked it up. It was made of very fine, openwork batiste, white lawn to be precise. I hesitated a moment, partly out of shyness, and also partly because I was tempted to keep the glove as a souvenir, that little fabric hand that I could squeeze in *my* hand, put in my pocket, Antoinette's hand. . . . In the end, I ran after her and gave her back her glove. It had happened! We were acquainted. It would have been too stupid of me to miss that chance! If I'd only known! Though perhaps I already should have been able to understand. We met again later, and even then I didn't understand a thing, even though. . . .

I was doing my military service—in the First Cavalry Regiment. I had a mare I was very fond of. Her name was Ayesha. When I harnessed her in the mornings I had the impression that I was dressing her, dressing a woman, yes, with a headstall, a saddle, a girth, the lot! One day we were out on exercises. Field-service uniform, the helmet, the cavalry magazine rifle, the saber, the greatcoat rolled up

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behind the saddle, the flask, all the paraphernalia. Suddenly, around the bend in a road, what do I see? Antoinette! In a ray of sunlight, she was white and all alone, like an apparition. She told me later that she was scared, a young girl isolated like that and faced with a whole regiment of men on horseback walking toward her, who were certainly going to smile, and snicker, and crack jokes when they saw her! But she wanted to be brave. She summoned up all her energy and walked on, turning her eyes away from the soldiers. And then, bingo! The dirty tricks fate plays! The troop was just beginning to pass her when she heard a faint popping sound coming from her clothes. Next she felt an abnormal freedom around her waist, and then immediately something light falling down onto her feet. She had just lost her panties! She stopped, paralyzed, her head swimming, and she kept saying to herself, I'm going to faint, I'm going to faint, I'm going to faint, I'm going to fall down onto the ground with my skirt hitched up, the soldiers will come flocking around me, how awful, how awful! And then she noticed a certain confusion among the cavalrymen. One of them had somersaulted over his horse's neck and fallen onto the ground. The other horses stopped or stepped aside, so as not to trample him. It was me! I was the only one to have seen Antoinette's little panties landing on her shoes, and it had taken my breath away, it had made my heart stop, and I had passed out! It was a bit like the day of the glove, but a hundred times, a thousand times more potent. Antoinette took advantage of it to step out of her panties and stuff them in her bag. She was all set to scoot without waiting for any more when she recognized me. It was her little neighbor lying there on the cobblestones! Some of the men had dismounted, they had slid a greatcoat under the back of my neck, and they were trying to make me drink from a flask. The liquid ran down over my chin. Then Antoinette took pity on me. Instead of making her escape she came up, knelt down by my side, and wiped my face with her handkerchief. . . . Well, with what she thought was her handkerchief! Because, after they'd taken me to the infirmary in the barracks, what did I find around my neck? Her little panties! Completely soaked in alcohol! I was drunk, yes, but it wasn't the smell of the alcohol that was intoxicating me! It became my fetish, that little pair of panties. Three weeks later the war came, the phony war at first, and then a war that was a lot less phony and a lot less funny. Especially for the cavalry. The cavalryman is an anachronism when he's faced with German armored divisions. Panache—oh yes, we had plenty of panache! One day we were on the top of a hill. And

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down in the valley, what did we see? A column of enemy tanks. The captain didn't hesitate: Draw swords! Cavalry charge! For the honor of the Regiment!

We charged. The krauts picked us off with their machine guns. Ayesha got a bullet in her chest. I went crashing into the alfalfa, stunned but unhurt. All my pals were massacred. I was the only one safe and sound. Why? Because I was wearing my little fetish around my neck. I wasn't even parted from it when I got sent to a camp in Silesia with thousands of others. I must tell you that Antoinette and I had come together in a way through our families being neighbors. Antoinette had become what they call a wartime godmother to me. She wrote to me and sent me chocolate, sugar, jam, and underclothing too. But it was underclothing for me, men's stuff. I didn't ever dare write and tell her the sort of underclothing I would really have liked.

Men's underclothing. . . . That was the most sinister thing of all in the stalag, all those men with their ragged clothes that they spent their time patching up as best they could. A uniform. That's really something! Naked under the shower, an officer, a noncommissioned officer, an enlisted man, they're just three men, no more, no less, whether ill-favored or well built. What's more, the Germans and us, the conquerors and the prisoners, without our uniforms we were all alike. They say that the tailor makes the man. How true! A naked man is a worm without dignity, without a function, he has no place in society. I've always had a horror of nudity. Nudity is worse than indecent—it's bestial. Clothes are the human soul. And even more so than clothes, shoes.

Shoes. . . . I learned a lot about shoes when I was a prisoner. Every evening, in the huts, they used to confiscate our shoes. That was to stop us from escaping. Without shoes we were submen, human wrecks, the scum of the earth. And in any case, the main difference between our conquerors and ourselves was in our shoes, or rather, boots. . . . Yes, the whole of Germany at the time, Nazi Germany, was contained in its boots. You know, right after the war, they shot a whole lot of S.S. torturers. That was an extreme solution and very crude. All they had to do was confiscate their boots. Yes really, I mean it! No more boots, no more torturers! Take the most sadistic Nazi torturer, deprive him of his boots, give him a pair of slippers instead, great big peasant felt slippers with buckles. You'll turn him into a lamb. It's like a tiger if you extract his teeth and claws: then all he can do with his paws is caress you, and with his jaws, kiss you.

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And it isn't only the S.S. and their boots. The whole man is in his shoes. Well, let's take smugglers as an example. People sometimes say the Basques have smuggling in their blood. What *I* say is that it isn't in their blood that the Basques have smuggling, it's in their shoes, in their espadrilles. Take his espadrilles away from a Basque, make him wear a mountaineer's heavy, nailed boots—no more smuggling!

But captivity was tough because of the lack of women. Oh, sure, there were possibilities sometimes, when we went to work for the locals. My pals took advantage of this. I never did. Because for me, women, they aren't . . . how can I put it. . . . They're more to be consumed elsewhere than eaten on the premises, if you see what I mean. Women are the atmosphere they radiate around them. That was why the camp was terrible. It was all men, and more men. I realized later that men could be of some use too, that they too could have a meaning. But I hadn't got that far when I was a prisoner. Men, I really couldn't see why they existed. So when the idea of an escape came up, I was one of the first to be interested.

Every month a truck went from hut to hut picking up the dirty clothes and taking them to a little factory five kilometers away to be decontaminated. We reckoned that a couple of men could get out of the camp by hiding in the truck. After three kilometers it had to pass through a fairly dense forest on a lonely road. That was where we should jump out. After that, it was merely a question of walking, food, and luck. Fate picked on me and one of my comrades for the first attempt. We hid in the back of the truck while it was being loaded with the clothes from our hut. We left the camp without any problem. It was as easy as pie. Five minutes later, we entered the forest. My companion jumped out of the truck, hid under the nearest trees, and waited for me. I didn't jump. I'd fainted. I hadn't been able to stand the sickly stench of the dirty laundry. Men's dirt, a virile stench. And a cold smell too, maybe that was the worst. It's like a pipe: a warm pipe, even if it's old and dirty, is a smell you can put up with. But a cold pipe is a dead pipe, it stinks. If the body needs its clothes to keep it warm, clothes too need a body to keep them warm. Clothes that have been away from a body for too long finally die. The pile of stuff in the truck had become dead clothes, carrion clothes.

I hadn't been able to hold out. Antoinette's little panties had made me faint with joy when I fell onto the cobblestones. The truck full of the prisoners' dirty linen had made me faint with horror and disgust. When they unloaded the truck at the factory my unconscious body rolled out in the middle of the bundles. Lucky for me I didn't

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end up in a boiler! They raised the alarm at once. My companion was caught. The dodge of the dirty linen truck had become unusable. And it was my fault. My companions were mad at me. I was ashamed. But it wasn't actually my fault, it was my nature. Nothing is my fault! I'm at the mercy of my fate. Because I—though you might not think it—*I* have a fate, and it's terrible to have a fate! You think you're like everyone else. There doesn't seem to be anything special about you. But you're not really free. All you can do is obey your fate. And *my* fate is . . . is . . . *(in a barely perceptible voice)* frills and flounces.

And to prove it, Antoinette was waiting for me at the station in Alençon when I came back from captivity in 1945. She was there with our families, my little godmother. The first thing I noticed was her dress. I can still see it, what's more—a white organdie dress with a little apron covered with flowers and birds intertwined. And over her shoulders she was wearing a big shawl made of black wool, as delicate as lace. I was sorry she wasn't wearing a hat. In the miserable conditions I'd been in as a prisoner, I had always dreamed of women wearing rather crazy hats, either felt or straw, with feathers, flowers, ribbons, and above all, oh, above all with little veils! A woman's face is so beautiful and exciting seen through the delicate, quivering shadow of a veil! But that was all finished. The war did away with hats, and the veils vanished with the hats. Women go out hatless, their heads naked, their faces naked. Nakedness is so sad! But even so, Antoinette was my fate, with neither veil nor hat. Three months later, I married her.

I sometimes tell myself: you shouldn't have. A man of destiny doesn't marry, he remains celibate, he becomes a recluse, or else a priest, yes, all alone in a presbytery with an old housekeeper. And anyway, we have to face facts: when it comes to frillies, priests certainly get their satisfaction. Priests, they deny themselves nothing! One day—not long after I'd been liberated—I passed a shop on the Place Saint-Sulpice. "The Elegant Clergyman," it was called. Well! In the window there were things like nylon cassocks, silk stockings in white, crimson, purple, violet, and lace surplices, and gold-embroidered chasubles, and mauve, red, and black capes. What a sight! I simply had to go in and touch all those supernatural garments. Deep down, though, they made me feel uneasy. Because even so, all that stuff was still men's clothes. Oh, beautiful clothes, princely clothes, episcopal clothes, archiepiscopal clothes! Nothing in common with the prisoners' rags. The precise opposite, but even so, men's clothes,

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clothes that smelled of fathers, hairy chests, stubbly faces. Because as I have already said, it was only later that I realized what men were all about. In any case, I don't want any part of the elegant clergyman, thanks all the same. The religious vocation is just a dead end. So let's settle for marriage. With Antoinette.

The wedding night. A real shock. Because well, obviously, I'd never had anything to do with women. Before the war I was too naïve, too shy. And as for the ones you could sometimes see and have when you were a prisoner. . . . My pals, oh sure, they took advantage of them when they went to work in a commando. There was a great shortage of men in the German towns and villages in those days. There *were* chances. But never for me. They were too badly dressed, those chances. The way they got themselves up—you should have seen it! For me it's very simple—a badly-dressed woman disgusts me. You should have seen the undies the Pomeranian peasant women exposed when they were picking potatoes and showing their backsides to the skies!

So there we were, married, me and Antoinette. The same day we left on our honeymoon in my father-in-law's car. Headed south. I was driving. We'd decided to look for somewhere to sleep when we'd had enough of driving for that day. So we landed up in the Auvergne, in the mountains, at Besse-en-Chandesse. Hôtel de l'Univers. Shabby but clean, rustic style. A big room with a very high ceiling and a huge, copper-framed bed. The moment you touched it, the bed jingled like cowbells, or like a troika. In one corner of the room there was a curtain that slid along a rectangular rod, and behind it there was a washbasin with a metal bidet. Not exactly the place of your dreams for a wedding night. Still, we'd rather asked for it, hadn't we? We sat down on the bed, and it made a terrific noise. We laughed, and then we looked at each other. After that Antoinette said, "You go for a walk, I'll get ready." I went out. I lit a cigarette and wandered around the village streets. I was ill at ease. I felt something serious was going to happen. Up till then I'd been reprieved. That was over now, and I had my back to the wall, or to the bed, rather, and I had to turn around and face it. Really though, the thing that was worrying me was what must be going on in Antoinette's little head. Antoinette was a well brought up girl, religious, modest, chaste. Oh, you never had to worry with her, never one word louder than another, never a gesture, never a wink. Only the thing was, she was married now. And her husband was me. Well then, she must have said to herself, prudishness is a thing of the past, we're turning over a new page, I have a husband now. . . .

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When I went back into the room, after knocking on the door timidly, Antoinette was lying on the troika. Stark naked! And she was looking at me and smiling, a little red in the face even so. But I didn't recognize her. Oh sure, there was her face, with its smile that I loved, but that big white body displayed there in front of my eyes like . . . like. . . . like something in a butcher's window! And I was ashamed for her, for myself, for us both. I blushed. And how I blushed! And she was still smiling, and holding out her arms to me! In the end I looked away, I was so miserable, and finally I saw the chair. The chair, yes, what a relief! What chair, you're going to ask? The chair she'd put her clothes on, of course! It was like a little island of solid ground in the middle of a swamp. So I went over to the chair with confident, slow, automatic steps, a sleepwalker's steps, a robot's steps, steps that know where they're going, steps that don't have the slightest hesitation. I stopped in front of the chair and, well, I went down on my knees and buried my face in the pile of clothes. A warm, soft pile, which smelled good, like new-mown hay in the summer sun. I stayed there a long time like that, on my knees, my face hidden. Antoinette was wondering whether I was saying my prayers or whether I'd gone to sleep. Next I picked up the clothes, held them in a heap against my face, and stood up, keeping them there so as not to see anything. I walked over to the bed and threw them higgledy-piggledy over Antoinette's body. And I said, "Get dressed!" Then I rushed out like a maniac.

I was feverish. I was miserable. I had to run around the village at least three times. Then I landed up in a bistro. And I who never drink, I drank. Cheap red wine, glass after glass. Antoinette came and found me there. I was drunk. It seems that I was looking at my empty glass with a stupid expression on my face and saying: when my glass is full, I empty it; when my glass it empty, I pity it. I was the one to be pitied. I certainly was in a fine state. But after all, aren't you supposed to get drunk on your wedding night? Antoinette left a bill on the table and led me out, yes, led me, took me, dragged me, to the Hôtel de l'Univers, up to our room, our bridal suite, to the troika. There, she kissed me. Then I pushed her over onto the troika and, to the accompaniment of a terrific jangling of bells, she became my wife. Dressed, fully dressed, that time!

After that, after that. . . . Well, we had to get used to each other. There was a certain amount of trial and error, of hesitation, at first, of course. We had to get to know each other, she had to find out what her husband was like. Oh, and then me too, I also had things to learn. Because actually, *I* didn't know what was the matter with

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me, either. Well, what was wrong with me wasn't prudery. Anything but! It went much deeper than that. It's very simple. For me, a body without clothes is . . . it's a tree without leaves, or flowers, or fruit. A tree in winter, as you might say. Just wood! Then you will ask me: And what about clothes without a body? Now *that's* quite a different matter! They haven't come alive yet when they're in a shop window or inside the shop, but they show promise! Well, the thing is, if you had to choose between a body without clothes and clothes without a body, which would you prefer? Er. . . . Actually, I'm only hesitating out of politeness, so as not to seem too dogmatic. But to be quite honest, I wouldn't hesitate a moment! For me a body is only a . . . a thing to display clothes on, a clothes peg, that's all. And long live frillies!

Then what about Antoinette, you'll ask. Ah, but my wife wasn't unhappy! Sometimes it's an advantage to have a husband like me. Antoinette was the best got up woman in Alençon. It was a sort of pact between us, a balance, a funny sort of balance to tell the truth. To start with we had agreed that she would never appear naked in front of me. Never! Nakedness is for when you're washing. Not for me. None of my business. Private. A woman's secret. A shameful secret. Every man for himself in that domain. But as she was very sweet she always chose amusing undies, comic things, if you see what I mean. Only the trouble was, Antoinette had been brought up in a convent. So, obviously, her daring innovations were always a bit restrained. And then, we lived in Alençon, and although Alençon is a charming town, and they even make beautiful lace there, when it comes to naughty frillies, Alençon, huh?

One day I pulled a little package out of my pocket. A surprise for Antoinette. She opened it: a bra. In black satin. Unfortunately, I'd had rather big ideas. Naturally, the imagination embellishes everything. And Antoinette's boobs went bouncing up and down in it like those pink tropical birds, waxbills, in their cage. I had to go and change it. But the lesson had borne fruit. I made a note of all Antoinette's measurements, her size in everything. At first I wrote it all down, then I learned it all by heart. I could recite it for you now, twenty years later. She was a numbered woman, was Antoinette, measured, indexed, quantified. . . . And every two months I brought the whole thing up to date. Obviously, because women change. That way, no more mistakes. And it was necessary, because I rarely came home empty-handed. There was no stopping it, and everything became more and more fashionable, more and more sophisticated, less

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and less decent. . . . It had become a real passion. I took trips to Paris, real pleasure trips, all alone with my ideas. But I also knew all the lingerie shops in the region, in Mortagne, in Mamers, in L'Aigle, in Chartres, in Dreux, and even as far as Le Mans! Because you see, clothes in a drawer, or displayed, or on hangers, they're things that have had life promised to them and that are demanding to be given life. Little souls that need a body before they can really exist. When I wander around these displays, I have the impression that these little souls are calling to me. They're shouting out: I want to live, me too, me too, take *me!* So I look at them all tenderly, I caress them lovingly, it disturbs me, well, it used to disturb me, especially when I could imagine them on Antoinette's body, warmed and brought to life by Antoinette's body, and I was happy, so happy. . . . I used to choose the nicest ones, the most appealing ones, the most poignant ones, and I'd rush back home to submit them to Antoinette, to Antoinette's body which would give them life. It was marvelous to see these dainty, delicate little objects, though they were still dry and flat, swell, blossom like flowers, ripen like fruit. . . .

But obviously, this made problems. On the financial side, if you see what I mean. I was a banker at the time, third cashier in the Bank of Alençon. I didn't like my job, because I couldn't see any connection between my little metal grille and the only thing in the world that interested me. True, enormous sums of money passed through my hands every day. But in the first place, it was absolutely impossible to put a single sou in your pocket. Bank cashiers are all scrupulously honest. Not surprisingly, they have no choice. It's one of the rare jobs in which theft is totally out of the question. Impossible. Everything is too well counted, checked, supervised. So no need to be virtuous. In such circumstances, the worst rogue becomes a square shooter. No choice. And then, there was something else. Paper money doesn't mean a thing to me. It has always left me cold. They used to bring it to me in sealed packages of a million old francs. You break open the metal strip, and out come the bills. Stiff, ice-cold, varnished, glazed. Not for me, thank you. Human warmth! Without human warmth, nothing doing. But I saw things from a different point of view the day I did the incineration for the first time. The incineration of old bills. Normally it was the chief accountant who did the incinerating. In the presence of a special official. The chief accountant was on holiday. The second cashier ought to have done the incineration in his place. In the presence of an official. He was sick. So I had to do the incinerating. In the presence of an official. I was

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burning old, torn, dirty, mutilated bills, but the most important thing about them was that they had been softened. Oh, soft, so soft, like tissue paper, like silk. Those silky bills that no one wants anymore. Every month they get burned. In the presence of an official, who makes a note of their numbers. You put them in a metal box. You sprinkle gasoline over them. Then you throw a match. Oh, it's soon over! I've seen whole fortunes go up in smoke! The first time, a strange impression, yes indeed. Tears in my eyes, I swear. So I asked to be allowed to do all the incinerating. Why not? I was the only person it amused. And then, on the security side, there was always the official, writing his report. I became the chief incinerator. But when the official had gone, I stayed there. I touched the sides of the box. Still warm, practically boiling hot. I poked around in the ashes with a trowel. Sparks flew. Quite soon I was able to plunge my hand into it. It was so soft! The beautiful pearl-gray ash was as warm as a breast, I scooped it up in the trowel and gently, gently poured it into a bag. And it ended up in my house. My cellar was full of it, little bags full of ashes, each one with the date of the incineration on it and the total amount of the burned bills. It wasn't long before I was a billionaire. I wandered around town, casual as you like, with a bag containing a hundred million in my hand. I looked in the shop windows, at the jewels, the luxury automobiles, and especially at the beautiful clothes. Their prices made me laugh in pity. But I didn't dare go into the stores. With my bag full of ashes, they'd have taken me for a madman. Me, a madman? I'm as sane as they come!

One day I was hanging around outside an antique shop. Some really fine period furniture and worn, faded, discolored tapestries, just like my silky bills. I hung around, and hung around, and the owner of the shop was sitting there, out front, on a big settee, looking at me. He was an old Jew with a beard. He had a funny sort of skullcap on his head and shrewd little eyes. He spoke to me. I don't know what he said. I replied. In short, we had a bit of a chat, and finally I sat down beside him on the settee. Out of the blue he asked me what I had in my bag. I couldn't resist it. I spilled the whole story to him, told him what the ash was, and what the figures written on the bag were—the lot. The old man looked at me with his little eyes screwed up, then he began to laugh. He couldn't stop laughing. It was beginning to annoy me. Because it's true, I don't like people who cackle for no reason.

"There's a discrepancy," he said at last.

"Discrepancy? What sort of discrepancy? What d'you mean by discrepancy?"

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"A discrepancy between your fortune and you."

"Don't understand."

"But of course! You possess an extinct fortune, but you're very much alive. There's a discrepancy."

"What'll I do, then?"

"Nothing. Just wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Wait until you've caught up with your fortune."

"How?"

"By dying. Billions in ashes, that implies a billionaire in ashes."

It wasn't so stupid! I got the point. To recover that fabulous fortune, all I had to do was get myself incinerated too. So I transformed my cellar into a columbarium. Stacked on shelves were bags full of ashes, with their date, and the amount of their content. And in the middle, a sort of niche with an urn. And on the urn, my name, and no date. Not yet. And I began to wait. I waited until I discovered another kind of paper money, the nestling bill.

The nestling bill! A sensational discovery! And I can truly say that the nestling bill changed my life. I remember so well. It was a beautiful April morning. A customer came to the bank to withdraw some money. A lot of money. So much that he couldn't cram it into his wallet. He tried, and then gave up. And he put the bills straight into his pocket, where his wallet had been. And departed. Then I noticed the wallet. He'd left it behind on the counter by my grille. I picked it up, meaning to give it back to its owner. But I'd barely touched it when I began to tremble. I felt the worn morocco leather, it was very flexible, and swollen like a soft belly. I opened it. Some human things spilled out of it: photos, letters, an identity card, and even a lock of hair. And all this was warm. You could feel that it had been for hours against the beating heart of a human being made of flesh and blood. The warmth of the breast, as you might say. And of course, there was also some money. Used bills, velvety and warm, living bills. Not yet destined for incineration, but as good as. Nestling bills. When I touched them I was just as agitated as when I touched a chemisette or a nightdress, but in a different way. I had just discovered men's raison d'être. I had hated men for so long. It's true—what's the use of them? But this time I'd come to understand them. Women are delicate, soft, perfumed lingerie. Men are a wallet swollen with secret things and silky, sweet-smelling bills. For money does have a smell, provided it's living and warm. It smells good, ladies and gentlemen! That was why I had never understood my comrades in captivity. Prisoners don't have any money. They are

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poor, impoverished, unclean, and unjustifiable. And when I was buried in the prisoners' dirty linen, what I was really doing was approaching men as I approach women—through their underclothes. How gay can you get! Error, aberration, youthful folly! A man is to be approached through his wallet! This first wallet, found, stolen, found-stolen, was like a personal link between an unknown man and me. But when I say unknown! I knew his name, his date of birth, his address, his profession. I possessed his photo and that of his wife and two children, Raymonde, five years old, and Bertrand, three and a half. There was also an extremely affectionate letter that wasn't signed by his wife. . . . So that was it: on the one hand, women's garments, and on the other, men's nestling bills. What's the connection, you ask me? But it's simple: with nestling bills, you buy garments. Because you see, I soon understood that between nestling bills and garments there's a sort of . . . how can I put it . . . a sort of affinity, of complicity! Yes, complicity. Men's natural function is to provide the nestling bills that get transformed into furbelows.

So naturally, I didn't stop at this first wallet. I continued the hunt for the nestling bill. A strange kind of hunt, upsetting, dangerous, voluptuous. Ah, the nestling bill is something quite different from the woodpigeon or the grouse! It isn't enough to get up early in the morning. Yes, I became a pickpocket. That's what they call it. I picked things out of pockets. Jacket pockets and pants pockets. But not out of jackets left lying over the back of a chair! No, I picked straight from the animal. Because the prey must still be warm. I was hunting warm wallets. It's like someone who goes hunting—well, rabbits for example. The rabbit he picks up must still be quivering. If it's a cold, stiff corpse, it disgusts the hunter. Therefore, jackets and pants still on the animal. Yes, pants too, because some men keep their wallet in their revolver pocket. Obviously, that's much easier to pick than the inside pocket of a jacket. But on the other hand, it's money that doesn't have the same quality, if you see what I mean. The money from the inside jacket pocket is money from the heart, the very best kind of money ever made. Bills from there, bills nestling in the moisture of the armpit, like eggs in their nest in the spring. The money from the revolver pocket of a pair of pants, oh sure, it's easier, but it's backside money, it lacks quality. All the same, though, when the opportunity presents itself . . . a nice fat wallet sticking out of a revolver pocket. . . .

At first, Antoinette was delighted with all these gorgeous undies that came showering down into her drawers until she didn't

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know what to do with them anymore. But then, bit by bit, she got worried. It was all very well for me to tell her that I'd had a raise at the bank, she wasn't an idiot, and she could count. But it was like a vice with me, a drug, I couldn't stop. And then there was the business of Mademoiselle Francine's bra, which wrecked everything.

Mademoiselle Francine was a cashier, a colleague, in short, except that she exercised her profession at the Majestic Cinema. Usually though, cashiers are perched high up, they dominate. The Majestic is a cinema in a basement, in a cellar, you might say. The cash desk is halfway down the stairs. Which means that when you arrive, you go down a few steps, then you stop at the cash desk which is a bit lower still. You pay, and then you go on even farther down. Only there's no point anymore, because you've seen the show in the meantime. Well, I'm speaking for myself. Because Mademoiselle Francine always wears breathtakingly low-cut tops. So when you go down toward the cash desk, obviously, you plunge . . . into the cashier's décolleté. You plunge, and what do you see? You'll never guess. A bra, an adorable little bra in mauve satin trimmed with lace. Well, after that, you could have shown me anything you liked, a western, a thriller, a spy story: there was only one thing on the screen for me —a satin bra, and mauve in the bargain, because my imagination has always been in technicolor. The worst of it was that Antoinette loved the movies. She dragged me off to the Majestic at least twice a week, and it was the torment of Tantalus for me. I was madly in love, you see! I had to put an end to it.

I made a few little inquiries. I discovered that Francine was the girlfriend of the manager of the Majestic, and that he had fixed her a studio apartment on the floor above the auditorium. Joining the two —the auditorium and the apartment—was a little spiral staircase. All this rather favored my plans. One evening I went out a little before midnight, telling Antoinette that I would sleep better if I stretched my legs a bit. I made straight for the movie house. I knew that a quarter of an hour before the end you could go in without being seen. No more cash desk; no more usherettes. Obviously, no one would want to go in a few minutes before the end of the show. I hid on the spiral staircase and waited. The house lights went up and everyone left. The projectionist shut the doors. I stayed there in the dark for quite a while. Then I very cautiously went up the stairs, one by one. I listened at the door for a long time. Nothing. No sound. Was Francine there? I tried to open the door. It was locked. I didn't know what to do. I sat down on the top step. I must have made a

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noise. Suddenly a ray of light filtered through under the door and I heard a voice saying, "Is that you, Pet?" Sounds came from inside. I squeezed myself into a corner. The door opened. Francine appeared in her dressing gown. She didn't see me. She went down the stairs. I rushed into the room. I saw only one thing, yes, really only one, in the chaos all around: the mauve bra waiting for me on a little table. I grabbed my fetish and went and hid in my dark hole on the landing again. It was high time. There was the sound of a flushing system on the floor below, and Francine came back up. She went in and locked the door. I crept down as quietly as I could. I knew that the doors of the emergency exits are never bolted on the inside. There's a gadget which merely stops you opening them from the outside. I darted off with my trophy. I pressed it to my heart. I was so happy I could barely walk.

Antoinette certainly suspected something. At the time, she didn't say anything. But that bra posed some problems. No question of her wearing it. In the first place, because it obviously wasn't new. Its smell alone! It drove *me* crazy, but there was no likelihood of it going to Antoinette's head. And in any case, I wouldn't have wanted that. I've always been against mixing things. Bigamy, orgies, they disgust me. It was Francine's bra, her essence as you might say, the key to her very being, if I make myself clear. No other woman could wear it. And even though I hid it on a shelf behind some of my books, she found it. One day when we were quarreling, she flung it in my face. "And what's more, you're being unfaithful to me!" she shouted. Obviously, you'll think, that was just a manner of speaking. But according to our system it was, after all, logical. Yes, all right, I *was* being unfaithful to her with Francine, with a bra as proxy. Especially as that came on top of her previous anxiety. She was on edge, was my Antoinette. She certainly suspected that I was stealing. But after all, those thefts were for her. Sure, they were dangerous and dishonest, but they were for *her*. Whereas in this case. . . . In short, things were already going rather badly when the business of the metro happened. Now there, I really do wonder what can have got into me! That was what wrecked everything. I was a real nut!

That day she'd come to Paris with me to buy our Christmas presents. We'd started going the rounds of the stores. Naturally, the only thing that interested *me* was elegant lingerie. But what I hadn't foreseen was the effect it would have on me to see Antoinette in the middle of it all. Masses of pretty little furbelows on display, with Antoinette in the middle. Like a barn full of nice dry straw and hay, if you see what I mean, and right in the middle a big wood fire sending

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out flames and sparks all over the barn. You can imagine the result! With Antoinette in the middle of the store, the effect of the fripperies was multiplied tenfold, a hundredfold. They burned me, they set me on fire with pleasure and joy. I was intoxicated. Antoinette must have been getting worried when she saw all the money she'd brought for quite different things melt away in purchases of women's clothes and underwear. But it was especially my state of excitement that panicked her. Though it was a little her fault, after all. Her presence in flesh and blood illuminated the displays. The slips, the panty hose, the stockings, the panties, the chemisettes, all those little orphaned objects were crying out to her. I heard them. I could hear nothing else. I had to obey. I obeyed. I bought, and bought, and in less than two hours we didn't have a sou left, we were cleaned out, me and Antoinette both. But covered in packages, pyramids of packages. My Antoinette was *not* pleased. But I was floating on air, like in a dream. And that was how, her beefing, me floating, we made our way to the metro.

We went down the stairs and then, with all our packages, we found ourselves semiwedged in the swing gates. We maneuvered ourselves back and forth, like railroads. At this point a little woman slid between us, saying "Excuse me! Thank you!" And pff! she was through. Only, there was the draft. A ferocious draft was sweeping through the half-opened gates. It hoisted up the girl's miniskirt and held it there for a moment, even though she quickly clamped both hands down on her thighs. But in that split second, I had seen a garter belt, and what a garter belt, that burned me, that pierced me, that practically killed me, yes. In black nylon, gathered, wide, the white skin of her thighs contrasting sharply with the long, very long garters which started at the belt and traveled down to collect her stockings in their little chromium-plated clips. It reminded me of a greasy pole, or rather of the sort of hoop around the top of a greasy pole with sausages and hams hanging from it. I had to have that garter belt to crown this memorable day! I shoved all my packages into Antoinette's arms. I told her, "Wait for me, I'll be right back!" And I abandoned her there, in the drafts, too flabbergasted to protest. And I scooted! I chased after the girl. I caught up to her and wedged her into a corner. Luckily we were alone. I stammered, "Your garter belt, your garter belt, quick, quick!" At first she didn't understand. Then, without hesitating, I pulled up her skirt. She screamed. I repeated, "Quick, your garter belt, and I'll go away." Finally, she obeyed. In the twinkling of an eye, it was done. I had my trophy. I said, "Thank you," and ran back to Antoinette, who was still jug-

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gling with her pyramid of packages in the drafts. I was radiant. I brandished my garter belt like a Red Indian flaunting his paleface's scalp. I told her, "Touch it! It's still warm!" And as both her hands were occupied, I stuck it against her face. But we had to beat it, because the victim was likely to kick up a fuss. We rushed out and dived into a taxi. Taxi, station, train, Alençon. Antoinette didn't say a word throughout the journey. The next day, she left me. For good. Went back to her mother. A catastrophe. I deserved it, oh yes, I deserved it! But a catastrophe all the same. . . .

Everything was over for me. I didn't go back to the bank. I read the Paris papers. They spoke about the sadist in the metro. They were hunting maniacs in the corridors. My victim lodged a complaint against X, then she switched it to the Paris Transport System. Because the System was supposed to be responsible for the safety of its passengers. It says so on the schedule of conditions. The things you learn from the newspapers! There was a court case. The plaintiff, my victim, lost. Well yes, a nonsuit as they call it! The counsel for the metro victoriously exploited the fact that at the moment of the attack she hadn't had her ticket punched. So the transport contract wasn't yet in force, and the System had no obligation!

No matter. I had death in my heart. Everything had collapsed with Antoinette's departure. Because my life was very fragile, you understand. I had to invent my own kind of happiness, to construct it. I'm not like other people. Other people have their lives all ready and waiting for them down to the last detail when they're born, it's lying there at the foot of their crib. But there was nothing waiting for me there. I had to invent it all for myself, by trial and error, by making mistakes and starting all over again. Nestling bills didn't interest me anymore. Nor did clothes, for that matter. The great light of my life had gone out. From pure habit I went back to a store, to the hosiery department. I thought it was to start stealing from the displays again. I did steal, yes, but it was quite a different matter. I discovered what I was looking for the day a store detective caught me red-handed pinching a nightdress. I'd had enough. I wanted to make an end of it.

I went to prison. Then they let me out on bail until my case came up. Ah, but that was the last thing I wanted! I had myself caught red-handed again in the same store! Then the judge sent me to a psychiatrist. I could have copped a six months' suspended sentence. First offender, so automatic suspension. And don't let us catch you again! They must have been joking! Thanks to my psychiatrist, they classified me as irresponsible. Acquitted by reason of irrespon-

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sibility. Acquitted, liberated, and shut up. In an asylum. For the last twenty years! Ah, the asylum isn't always a bed of roses! Its ice cold showers, the beds they strap you into, the straitjackets, insulin comas, shock treatment. Not always a bed of roses, no. But you have your little compensations. When you've been good, they sometimes let you go for a stroll. With my two favorite male nurses. You walk around. You look in the shop windows. Sometimes they even go for a drink and let me go shopping, when they're in a good mood. Today I was in luck. There's a sale on in a department store. Great piles of pretty undies.

*(As he speaks, he pulls a clothesline out of his pocket and hangs it up from one side of the stage to the other. Then from his other pocket he extracts an unbelievable quantity of feminine lingerie, which he fastens onto the line with clothespins.)*

Heaps and heaps of them, at your fingertips. Tight ones and loose ones. *(He brandishes a pair of panty hose and a nightdress.)* I've always wondered which had the most charm. There are two schools of thought. Tight things, now, they hug the figure and at the same time confine it, keep it firm. But they lack imagination. They don't speak to you. They're laconic, severe, they're disciplinarians. Whereas loose things, floating things, they're the ones that set you dreaming! They're chatty, they're a continual improvisation, they invite you to slip a hand in. . . .

*(The clothesline is now completely covered. He steps back and observes his handiwork. In the meantime the two male nurses — white coats under their overcoats, white caps — have entered at the back and are coming up the center aisle.)*

And when they float in the wind, they're so beautiful!

*(A fan in the wings animates and inflates the clothes hanging from the line.)*

And then, I have to stand at attention! Stiff as a post. Respect. Desire.

*(He stands at attention.)*

Everyone to his own flag. With some people it's the tricolor. With me, it's frillies.

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*(He notices his nurses.)*

Hm, I've got company. It had to happen.

*(He darts over to the underclothes and starts unpinning them and stuffing them into his pockets. Meanwhile the nurses are coming up onto the stage. They advance on him slowly, inexorably.)*

Wait, wait! You wouldn't want me to lose my little treasures!

*(They surround him and start leading him off. He doesn't put up much of a struggle.)*

Wait, not so fast. Look—what about that pink slip!

*(He eludes them and goes and grabs the slip. He takes advantage of this to pocket a nightdress as well. The nurses come back and start leading him off again.)*

But not so fast! Here, look, just that little girdle too. It's only a tiny little girdle!

*(He eludes them and goes and grabs the girdle. Plus two or three more articles. When the nurses surround him again, the only thing left on the clothesline is a pair of black panties.)*

Ah well, all right, let's go. Let's go, since we have to. But no shock treatment tonight, huh! That's a promise, huh? No shock treatment!

*(He turns around and sends a pathetic glance at the panties. In one bound he escapes the nurses yet again, jumps up onto the stage and returns, brandishing the panties.)*

Okay, okay, I'm coming. With my flag. The pirates' black flag. Long live death!

*(The nurses lead him off. For the last time, we hear):*

But no shock treatment tonight, huh! That's a promise. Tomorrow if you like, okay, but not tonight, no shock treatment. . . .

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**Ignacio Solares**

# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

Man lives simultaneously in two worlds: the given world and the world he himself invents, the world of imagination. For the artist, the relationship between these worlds is necessarily ambiguous. Where does one begin and the other end? Those writers imbued with a vision that aspires to totality go even further. For them the world of imagination contains all the elements of the given world and more. In the context of Latin American literature, where so many writers have limited themselves to formal matters, to the creation of texts intended as codes to be deciphered, the author pursuing that total vision is Mario Vargas Llosa. From his first novel, *La ciudad y los perros* [*The Time of the Hero*] to his most recent work, *La guerra del fin del mundo* [*The War at the End of the World*], he has constantly expanded his point of view, making it more complex, casting his net of concerns wider and wider in order to catch that elusive totality composed of the real and the imaginary.

He told me about his first attempts at writing.

*MVL:* Among the earliest things I ever wrote, the most significant, I think, was a notebook full of remarks on Faulkner. I was very young then and lived with some aunts. In the rich solitude of youthful reading, I began to cultivate a personal world, a world I have never abandoned. On the contrary, I live in it more and more every day.

At that age, around fifteen, he read a book that also turned out to be decisive in his development, *War and Peace.* He read it in a single, febrile, virtually sleepless week. The world of invention began to envelop the future writer.

*MVL:* Later I sat down to write with the same passion with which I had read, smoking three packs of cigarettes. I finished at dawn, totally broken down physically and mentally. Now I understand that physical health is essential for aesthetic creation, so I don't

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Editor's Note: This interview was translated from the Spanish by Alfred J. MacAdam. It first appeared in *Vuelta,* the Mexican cultural publication edited by Octavio Paz, in June 1982.

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smoke or drink. I write only in the morning, and I jog a bit before I begin to write.

Later he spoke to me about aesthetic creation almost as if it were a biological act. For him there are impulses and instincts that determine the direction of a given page in the same way a physical reaction might.

Vargas Llosa was about to leave for London, where, he said, he would remain incommunicado writing a new play. He wanted to buy a few Spanish-language books before leaving. It is a strange experience—not one I necessarily recommend—to go to a bookstore with a writer. There are some who stay there for hours, leafing through books they never buy or looking for things they already know aren't there. One writer friend always bought the latest titles, just to be "up to date." I doubt he read any of them. Another despised anything new and headed straight for the Everyman Series or for used book stores. I know one writer who smells books before buying them and another who always buys two copies of every book: one to read and give away and the other to maintain the perfection of his collection. What books did Vargas Llosa buy? I was astonished at the name he asked about as soon as we walked in: Azorín. I told him that the only Azorín reader I knew was José Emilio Pacheco.

*MVL:* Which is all to José Emilio's credit. I read Azorín a lot because he refines my ear. If you don't read well-written things in Spanish, you lose the music of the language.

*IS:* Which other writers would you read for that purpose?

*MVL:* Valle-Inclán. Gabriel Miró is another, I don't like *what* he says, but I get a great deal of pleasure from the way he says it.

Vargas Llosa also bought two books by Alfonso Reyes. He perused a new edition in Spanish of *The Man Who Was Thursday* and sadly recalled the days when everyone would go out looking for the authors Borges recommended.

*MVL:* I can remember searching through every bookstore in town for the plays by Bernard Shaw that Borges liked most. The same goes for Chesterton and Kipling.

He stopped at one of Tolstoy's books and told me how important Tolstoy was in his own intellectual development. I asked about Dostoyevsky.

*MVL:* Even though I've always thought him a great writer, he has never meant as much as Tolstoy for me. In fact, I think that this choice—after all, both are authors we all have to read—is a parting of the ways for a young writer: will he choose the exterior world or the interior world? Toward which will he direct his gaze?

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Later on, in tranquillity, with the tape recorder between us, we developed those earlier questions.

*IS:* The religious factor is as important in Tolstoy as it is in Dostoyevsky, so why, if you were influenced by either or both, was it only in your last book that religion came to have any importance? It's a central theme in other writers, Flaubert and Faulkner for example, who also influenced you.

*MVL:* I think that the absence of the theme of religion in my writings is one of my genuine limitations. Now it has appeared and is definitely a central theme. That's why, among other reasons, *La guerra del fin del mundo* [*The War at the End of the World*] is so important to me. The research I did for that book not only related to Canudos and the Brazil of the nineteenth century, but also to the phenomenon of religious experience itself. I started out reading about the history of the period and ended reading about religion, simply because I was fascinated by it.

*IS:* Even so, you maintain a critical distance because the characters in *La guerra del fin del mundo* are all religious fanatics.

*MVL:* Maybe when I began to work it was that way, but there is a huge difference between the Antonio Conselheiro I had in mind when I began to write the novel and the one who actually appears in the published text. At the beginning he fascinated me as a novelistic character, even though he repelled me because he incarnated that closed, intransigent, dogmatic fanatic's vision of things. But as I wrote, I began to see other sides of him.

*IS:* He began to come to life.

*MVL:* People said Antonio Conselheiro was a heretic, but I don't agree. Just three years ago his sermons were finally published, and they make surprising reading. It turns out he was completely orthodox. All he did was to carry that orthodoxy to its logical conclusions, which is what turned him into the fanatic who became the scourge of the nation, a scourge that had to be destroyed so that the life of the Church and the life of Brazilian society could develop. That's what makes him, in my mind, such a tragic figure, such a tragically human figure. He was a man shaped by a certain ideology, which he—out of honesty, or because he had no other choice—lived out. Accordingly, he tried to organize his social and personal life within those limits. People like that always end up persecuted, rounded up, oppressed, and liquidated. He was a pathetic case, and he became a much more human figure than the idea I had of him at first. I think that applies to many of the other characters as well.

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*IS:* About this humanization. Aren't the characters who come alive the ones that slip through the author's hands—like Don Quijote—and make him think as the character thinks instead of the other way around? In some way Antonio Conselheiro became more human and at a certain moment no longer fit into your original mold—the fanatic.

*MVL:* That's what's interesting about a novel. The story itself generates its own power, relationships you have to respect and which you just can't break without running the risk of killing the living part of the story. It happened that way with several of the characters in *La guerra del fin del mundo.* For example, when I first conceived the story, the Baron of Cañabrava was quite schematic. Then, suddenly, he became too complex to be just the *caudillo* landowner I had imagined. As a matter of fact, at a certain point, because of his psychological and intellectual strength, he becomes the character who best understands the phenomenon of Canudos. And that's something I hadn't foreseen, something the character himself imposed upon me.

*IS:* And where has all this religion business led you?

*MVL:* Look, it was something I was curious about, a fascination, even a kind of concern. But I don't think I'm more of a believer now than I was before. A few years ago I was absolutely uninterested in religion, but that's no longer true. I am now deeply concerned with it and not only in an intellectual, but in a human way as well. Perhaps in part it's because I've arrived at the conclusion that man is not only history, not by a long shot. If someone believes his being is totally historical, there is no way he can understand human behavior and, much less, social processes.

*IS:* Are you an atheist?

*MVL:* Not at all. I have always been an agnostic. And I say "always" because I think I was even when I was quite young, even before I knew what the word "agnostic" meant. I have always been disturbed to the same degree by people who believe *absolutely* in the existence of God and by people who believe *absolutely* in materialism, who deny the existence of God with religious fervor. I have always instinctively rejected extremist positions. But what has happened to me is that I now have an awareness, a greater openness to religious experience, both from an intellectual and a human point of view.

*IS:* Could you have a conversion?

*MVL:* The problem is that belief in God is essentially an act of faith.

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I can't see it any other way. An act of faith, not a cognitive problem.

*IS:* Changing the subject: violence seems to be the predominant theme in your works, a violence that permeates every level of life, that seems to devastate everything and grow greater. That kind of vision would seem to reflect a sceptical attitude about our possibilities for survival on this planet.

*MVL:* We live in a world of terrible violence, and if we find ourselves these days able to talk about an "end of the world," it is because violence has not diminished. On the contrary. Because of technological and scientific developments, violence today has actually reached the point where it can annihilate mankind. I'll say it again, there has been no progress in this area. In fact, we've gone backwards. I think violence continues to permeate all human relationships, to the point that it even coexists with the highest forms of art and culture. The Nazis were a flagrant manifestation of this phenomenon that has come to be ubiquitous. Violence has an indisputable place in life and holds an attraction that culture is incapable of neutralizing. The young people who kill, assassinate, and bomb in the developed nations do not spring from the uneducated classes; they are usually from the most intellectually privileged groups. In Latin America it is the intellectuals who are the greatest inciters to violence—they certainly don't combat it. Why, today there are groups within the Church itself that justify violence. That for me is terrible. It's one of the reasons why it is so difficult to be optimistic. If you take a good look around you, well . . . .

*IS:* Continuing with this theme, there would seem to be few dangers as serious for human survival as those that derive from radical ideologies—what Octavio Paz has called the plague of our time.

*MVL:* It is a very real, very serious problem—the age-old problem of fanaticism. It was a problem of a religious nature in the past, while today it tends to be political. But it's all the same: a vision of the world from a valid, exclusive point of view, with more or less prefabricated answers for all questions. Curiously enough, it occurs even among intellectuals. In this sense, I think the Latin American intellectual milieu is so backward in comparison with the European intellectual milieu, where a thoughtful review of ideological attitudes and positions does take place. I'm thinking particularly about the Left. In Latin America that flexible attitude about reviewing and reconsidering doctrines disproved or ren-

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dered questionable by reality has not taken hold. It hurts us and is one of the reasons for our underdevelopment. I have arrived at a fairly dramatic conclusion: Latin American intellectuals are some of the most powerful agents of Latin American underdevelopment because they keep us locked into schematic formulas and a black-and-white Manichaeism in which there are no gradations. An ideology with no shadings is the worst weapon imaginable.

*IS:* Don't you think equally serious the confusion we continue to live in—like those characters in Solzhenitsyn who die shouting "Long live Stalin!" when it is Stalin who is having them executed?

*MVL:* In my opinion, confusion and misunderstanding characterize politics in our time. And not only in Latin America, but throughout the world. Poland is an obvious example. How do you explain that in the name of socialist ideology—an ideology that thinks the working class will liberate humanity—these things are done? This is clear proof of our colossal confusion. Things like that are happening all over Latin America, in my own country, for example. We have just put a military dictatorship behind us, and we have reestablished a democratic system that seems more or less genuine. In our system there is a parliament in which, for the first time, all Peruvian ideological currents are represented, even the extreme left, which has its representatives and speakers there. In Peru there are sporadic outbursts of terrorism, because the government is supposedly weak. So people attack it as if it were Pinochet's regime. Another example is El Salvador, a really tragic situation because the military junta is in no way the government I would consider ideal for any Latin American country. I think the junta is populist, that in fact it is quite similar to Velasco's populist junta in Peru. It just won't work in Latin America. At the same time, I think that along with repressive military men there are also, doubtless, some who are well intentioned, irreproachable from the point of view of the struggle for liberty. So, to present the problem of El Salvador as a struggle between good (the guerrilla forces) and evil (the junta) seems to me a demagogic and false picture. I think the business is much more complex and that we have to try to understand the subtleties. If we lose sight of the small shades of difference, we get lost. Just as there are progressive forces that have a democratic, acceptable program, I think there are also forces that are totally intransigent and authoritarian. What these latter want is to establish a radically left-wing dictatorship in El Salvador. As far as I'm concerned, that's no solution at all, not for El Salvador, not for Peru, nor for any Latin American nation. I

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do not favor unconditional support for the guerrillas, because theirs is a very confused, ideologically heterogeneous alliance. I think those involved ought to go beyond the murders and repression one side commits and the terrorism the other side indulges in, to enter into negotiation and to seek a solution through elections. While I have no confidence in Latin American intellectuals, I have complete confidence in the peoples of Latin America.

*IS:* In some of your recent writings, above all the book you published in Puerto Rico, we have learned about your growing attachment to Camus and your drifting away from Sartre. This is related to your ideas on ideology, so would you tell us about this process of attachment and distancing?

*MVL:* The book you mention is a collection of articles I published over the course of some twenty years. It shows, I think, a pattern that begins with my almost unconditional adherence to Sartre's thesis about the writer's commitment, about literature as a weapon capable of producing virtually immediate social and political effects. Camus's ideas seemed to me, to the contrary, lyrical and even, at certain moments of my life, deceptive. Later on, after a lot of stumbling around, after a lot of mistakes, I began to grow disillusioned with Sartre's theses. Reality itself gave the lie to a goodly number of his theories, and at the same time Camus's theses suddenly took on new vigor and turned out to be very valid answers to a series of concerns of a political and ethical nature. I think Camus was very lucid with regard to two things: the first was that history is not everything. That is, to try to explain human predicaments exclusively by means of history is insufficient: man is not only history but something more. The purely historic vision of reality and of human problems is incomplete and always leads one to incomplete solutions to those problems. The second is the danger of ideology. I think that in this matter Camus was extraordinarily lucid. The danger of a purely intellectual, abstract vision must cut reality down so it will fit into its patterns. But reality is always more complex, richer. The only way in which you can impose a pattern on a reality that rejects it is through violence. I think that there we can find the history of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in our time. That deformation of ideas turns ideas into what Marx called fetishes, fetishes that eventually turn against men and enslave them. In Camus the problem really takes on its true dimension when he talks about ethics. The ends do not justify the means: the means are the only justification of the ends.

*IS:* I'm going to change the subject radically to ask you if you think

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Freud was right when he talked about the sublimation of neurosis through art. Or do you think Jung was right when he said that we create in spite of and not because of our neuroses?

*MVL:* I think normality, if there is such a thing, is incompatible with the artist's vocation. I think we create because of some maladjustment, of some conflict with the world or society. At least in our time, it seems to me that artistic creation follows that maladjustment, that disconformity. It would, doubtless, be inexact and false to explain creativity—any kind—simply by referring to neuroses the particular artist happens to suffer. There are lots of neurotics, and not all of them are artists. In each case we would have to take into account all the factors that enter into the situation so that we could arrive at an explanation based on the facts. I naturally do not believe that neurosis explains everything: maladjustment is merely a starting point. Here what Sartre referred to as a "choice" seems to me quite logical: at a certain point you simply take cognizance of yourself. And at that moment in which you take cognizance of yourself, you begin to reorganize your life, not only in relation to the neurosis that may be the origin of your vocation but also in relation to the exercise of that vocation. This has a reciprocal effect on your personality. The person who has been writing for twenty years is in no way the person who has just begun to write. Not only because he is twenty years older but because (of this I'm sure) his entire psychological structure has absorbed in some way the impact of that vocation. A vocation which can be translated into years, months, days, hours of worry and of routine work. That's my idea of it. It is, if you like, a somewhat eclectic notion as regards Freud and Jung. But the psychological explanation of what makes us artists seems insufficient to me, just as the Marxist explanation of artistic creation seems insufficient to me. It tends to suppress the individual in its attempt to explain everything as a problem of social relationships. The social factor, doubtless, does have a huge influence on the process of creation, but it's not the only influence. It seems to me to be both a rational and an irrational process in which instinct has a very important role—and this role is precisely the one which has been least studied. There is a kind of programming in the creative person's personality which we can call instinctive. There are certain pulsations that I have felt while I write, pulsations that lead you or push you and are beyond awareness. They are phenomena that have a biological, physical character, that impel you in a certain

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direction. You have to take all that into account if you want to explain the creative process.

*IS:* Who has given the best explanation of all this?

*MVL:* I think Georges Bataille. I have come to the conclusion that his explanation of the literary phenomenon is even more valid and more lucid than Sartre's, because while Sartre remains at a historical and social level, Bataille penetrates to the individual roots of the phenomenon. Bataille wrote lots of very complex things. One aspect of his work is his obsession—it goes beyond a mere concern—with religion, a kind of elevation of evil. I can't follow him there very well and am left with only a kind of intellectual curiosity with regard to evil. I read those texts only with great difficulty. On the other hand, the other Bataille stimulates me a great deal. He has allowed me to understand the phenomenon of creation—and human unhappiness—to a much greater degree. Bataille uses Freud in a direct, dramatic way and makes him into literature, rendering him all the more accessible. Bataille is a very interesting author who, unfortunately, has been deformed by structuralist frivolity, by the linguistic formalism of structuralism which has attempted to turn Bataille into its precursor, something Bataille never was. If there was ever an antiformalist author, it was Bataille. In fact, Bataille's purely creative writing is incredibly imperfect, precisely because of his horror at formal concerns. He thought those concerns killed the crudity of the experience literature should transmit. To attempt to make Bataille the master of contemporary formalists is one of the great falsifications of modern French criticism. It freezes something that in him was so vital, so dramatic, so ultimately tragic.

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## Andrei Siniavski

# THE JOKE INSIDE THE JOKE

Whenever two Russians or three Jews get together, or for that matter citizens of any Soviet nationality with a Russian schooling, or even Poles and Czechs, as long as the connection is socialist, they pelt each other with jokes, competing and arguing all the way. It doesn't really matter what kind of jokes they are. There is a certain exhilaration in asking the invariable, "Do you remember the one about . . . ?" and to hear, "Of course, I do!" in response. This is inevitably followed by, "Let me tell you the joke where. . . ." We like to know and be with those people who are geared toward jokes. They are our kind of people, meaning we understand each other at once.

Among close friends, we are used to telling jokes as a substitute for the latest news or at least to reminiscing about the jokes we remember. We seem unaware of how fortunate we are to live side by side with the joke and exist in an era of folk art, marked by the flowering of an immense folkloric genre.

We philologists, historians, or ethnographers sometimes dream: if only I had been alive during the Middle Ages, for example, or the Neolithic, when epics, sagas, and fairy tales were being composed and sung in the natural course of things; how many great truths, which are still shrouded in obscurity, I would have gleaned; I would have partaken in the making of poetry at its very source! Meanwhile, right before us or next to us, a mystery is being unfolded, in which we take part without even realizing it. Scholarship has not yet gotten to it. I am referring to folklore and the joke, at which it is high time to look more attentively.

Because the joke aspires to so little and is contiguous to our lives, it gets insufficient attention. It is not at all like the heroic epic or wedding ritual. The joke is nothing special, a trifle, a routine detail.

It is always more or less indecent and obscene, even if it does not touch on frivolous and scabrous themes that are typical for its twists and turns. Even so, it is still obscene. The transgression of a generally accepted behavioral or verbal norm is basic to the genre and the conditions of its functional development and existence. It is

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as if the joke wants to be forbidden on the spot, liquidated, and is being sustained by this expectation. Give it freedom, abolish the prohibitions, and it will bite the dust!

The appearance of a whole series of jokes with the intention of transcending the last barriers is not accidental. I am talking about jokes that test our resistance to squeamishness. Both the narrator and listener (that also means you and me) must gather courage in this instance and strain a little, holding back the lump of vomit involuntarily coming up in the throat. That is, they must discard the joke's literal meaning and go out into the fresh air, into the realm of aesthetics and philology, and not interpret the joke's words and plot literally or take them too close to heart. The effect of this series of jokes, especially the artistic effect, depends on our ability to do so: it is a test of our mettle. Let's see what we're capable of! The joke provides us with an endurance test, a trial of pure art, a provocation of durability, of belonging to the genre.

The test is conducted in the following manner: two tubercular patients (or syphilitics, for purposes of color and special titillation) are spitting into a glass until it is full. Having made a wager, the third participant in the meal undertakes to drink it all down in one gulp. The test has begun, and we are the jury. He drinks calmly and slowly, almost to the bottom. But at the end he can't seem to take it for some reason and puts the glass down. "Feeling squeamish, huh?" ask the other two maliciously. "Not at all," he answers crestfallen, "a piece of snot got caught. I couldn't bite through it!"

As I retell these miserable stories, I understand that what I am saying is intolerable, to listen to me is unpleasant, nauseating. But since I am going to approach the joke in a strictly experimental fashion, I should burn all of my bridges and ships from the very outset, in fact, in advance. As the proper framework for discussion, all apologies must be put on hold. If one is squeamish, there is no point in taking up the subject. But the joke is not just crude, it is fastidious in its own way, capricious, and always presupposes transgression of the permissible. It simply does not exist without crossing into forbidden territory. While asking for trouble and moral, if not police, intervention, it seeks out "its own kind," "the worthy," and "the initiated." Yet it will definitely be offensive to some, intolerable and unbearable to others. That is in its nature, which the joke openly enjoys and is thoroughly conscious of.

In general, the joke exhibits a heightened awareness of its own genre and form. It reproduces itself, looks back on itself, as if it is aware of its own identity, that it is a joke and not something else.

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The well-known economic notion of the "reproduction of production" may be applied to the joke in the sense that it has the tendency to raise itself to the second or even third power, while relying on the original characteristics of the genre. For instance, the joke is marked by brevity of form. Suddenly variants appear whose special task it is to boast about brevity. Although all jokes are absurdist at the core, suddenly specifically absurdist jokes begin to surface. Probably this exaggerated generic self-consciousness results in the occurrence from time to time of jokes that refer back to themselves. As a rule, they remind us that prohibition is their most important condition of origin, which at the same time must be violated. For example, it has been decided that there should be no more Jewish jokes: "We're tired of Jewish jokes." "All right, we won't tell anymore," agrees the respondent. "Two Japanese were walking along, and one says to the other, 'Look, Rabinowitz. . . .'"

A group of joke fans and specialists knows all the plots. For the sake of simplicity and brevity, they have numbered the jokes, and when the raconteurs get together in the evenings, they take turns calling out numbers. One evening, a new person is in their midst. Someone calls out "fifteen," and everyone laughs. After thinking a bit, another person shouts out "twenty-four." And again all laugh. It is the newcomer's turn, but he doesn't understand what is going on. He names "sixty-seven" at random. At first there is silence, then people get upset. A big tough fellow shakes his fist at him. "How dare you," he says, "and in front of ladies, you scoundrel!"

Numerous jokes are structured like taboos, which are then subjected to unceremonious transgression. That becomes the crux of the story. There are taboos on obscenity, political subversion, truth, the state of affairs in general, government secrets. On the other hand, we can observe the strict conformity to the prohibition, or its careful and clever avoidance, as when one is facing a dam. This produces a kind of Herculean piling on of one absurdity upon another, making the taboo comically nonsensical. The interdiction explodes itself. For example, many of the "Armenian radio" jokes are structured in such a way, as "answers to questions" which simply cannot be answered. They mimic the real question and answer format of the Armenian radio, which gives naive answers to equally naive questions. The absurd effect of these very popular jokes reflects the absurdity of Soviet reality.

Accompanied by the factory's party boss, a foreign correspondent is visiting a factory. All of a sudden he asks the first worker he

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sees for an interview: "Tell me about your apartment," says the correspondent.

"I have one room," answers the worker. The party boss glares at him from behind the correspondent's back, and the worker continues, "One room faces south, the second room faces the east, and the third the west."

"How much do you earn?"

"A hundred rubles." The party man again glares at him. "A hundred rubles . . . a week," specifies the worker.

"Oh! That makes 400 a month! Not bad. And now the last question: what kind of hobby do you have?"

"Fifteen centimeters," responds the worker, who does not understand the Russian loan word *khobbi* (hobby) and instead associates its sound with the obscene Russian word for the male sexual organ. The party boss glares at him again, and the worker explains, "Fifteen centimeters in diameter."

In a closed society of the Soviet type, where the parameters of a self-interested and complete existence are marked by all sorts of prohibitions (especially verbal ones), the joke is the only emotional outlet. More than that, it has actually developed into a model for living and serves the function of the microcosm inside the macrocosm. As such, it has become a kind of monad of the world order. The joke is in the air, but not in the form of dust. Like a spore, which contains everything that the soul needs in embryonic form, it is capable of reproducing the organism as a whole at the first opportune moment. Hence its readiness to provide universal formulas, explicating the epoch, history, or the nation. I have in mind not only the genre's propensity for final crowning formulations but also its desire to represent itself as the incarnation of an exhaustive universal scheme of things. This is its tendency to reconstitute "the joke inside the joke": the genre as such becomes aware of itself as a nucleus and prototype of a broader, all-encompassing joke, which can be equated with the rest of the world or reality. The relationship is analogous to a large Russian wooden doll with a small one inside it. Political jokes from the thirties reflect such formulaic structures: "How is life?" "Like in a streetcar: some are sitting [doing time in prison], others are shaking." Or, in a game of charades, an old Jew on a train asks a riddle: "The first syllable of my name is what Lenin promised, the second is what Stalin delivered." Two plainclothesmen hop down from the top bunk of the sleeping compartment. "Follow us, comrade *Raikher,*" they say. In this case the old man's last name

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replicates the charade of Soviet history. (*Rai* is the Russian for paradise, and *kher* is an obscene reference to the male sexual organ. In certain contexts *kher* means getting absolutely nothing.)

Perhaps nowhere in the history of letters has the theme of prohibition been so fundamental and forceful as in the Soviet joke. Interdiction also localizes the genre and makes it self-sufficient; these elements characterize the poetics of the joke in general and account for its flourishing in repressive Soviet society. Violating prohibition and fulfilling its usual function, the joke, as a matter of fact, exhausts itself and assumes the completed shape of a self-contained cosmos. Its move toward this forbidden solution is total and final, requiring no continuation or further explanation. The joke's freedom is only in the act of crossing the boundary. Once achieved, the joke becomes a perfect poetic structure, and like an end in itself, the transgression gives it a dynamic yet strictly circumscribed composition and the semblance of a well-constructed paradox concentrating on itself. The task has been completed, the joke has been told, and that's that.

Representing an ideal image of reality, the joke does not seek an outlet into morals, propaganda, politics, psychology, or even the real world. Its awareness of its own form allows us to view it and evaluate it as a sample of "pure art" or "art for art's sake." Entertaining and decorative, the joke introduces a touch of aesthetic pleasure into our commercial age and appears to have no other intentions. It is something else too. Like all art, it performs another very significant function: it introduces a certain amount of harmony, order, and reason into reality and brings it back to its senses and to an understanding of itself as lively and interesting. I would say that reality starts stirring under the joke's impact, acquiring a plot, manner, and phenomenality. This is especially evident since the joke operates on such a low plane of life and historical reality, a plane of social consciousness so insignificant that it seems unworthy of poetic intervention. And suddenly the meaning of "joining the party" or "party line" ("he deviated together with the line") becomes clear. The joke teaches us the meanings of "*diamat*" [dialectical materialism] and "democratic centralism" (when everybody is individually "against" something but is collectively "for" it), "personality cult," and "cosmopolitans." It also treats the way a man looks, even when he does not have a face! Like a dotted line, the joke perforates our history and galvanizes it. It not only recreates reality but actually restores it to us, and under its impact, reality begins at least to resemble something intelligible and real. One has the urge to ask an

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abstract and hypothetical question: isn't the joke (like all of art) an appearance of essence, no matter how much it sinks into the mire of general inertia and lifeless uniformity?

This may be the reason why the history of so-called realism is intertwined with the joke. I can't and won't go into the distant past, a time when the joke as a genre was different in form from what it is today. It is, however, not accidental that as a collection of jokes, *The Decameron* lies somewhere close to the source of realism. In Russian literature, the clearest expressions of realism are associated specifically with the jokes of Gogol and Chekhov. Yet, Gogol, it seems, was a writer of the fantastic, first and foremost. He saw the enticing and fabulous nature of the most trivial aspects of life and, with the help of the joke, created such a clear manifest image of reality that he was included among the realists.

Conversely, the joke is in no way a mere reflection of life in its normal flow, its logical and visual consistency. It is constructed to spite logic and that which we gain from our immediate life experience. I don't know whether there is such a concept as reverse logical connection; if not, it should be introduced in relation to the theory of the joke. The analogy with anecdotal "feminine logic" can be applied here: "My husband has been cheating on me so much that I don't know anymore who got me pregnant!" A person intends to say one thing and says something very different. It is the "other" or different reason which ends up being the real one, reestablishing the logical connection but in a reversed direction. For the speaker this is the only "logic."

There are many such examples in Soviet letters, especially the press, touching upon everyday life, politics, fiction, and the Soviet man's way of thinking. For example, besides freedom of speech, the press, and the right to demonstrate, all of which are aimed at strengthening socialist society, the new Constitution also stipulates the right to criticize defects of individual enterprises and institutions. Look, we have become so free and humane that we even can afford to criticize shortcomings in our work in order to fortify our virtues. If we proceed further in the Constitution, we are granted the right to "self-criticism."

Is that meant as profanity or mockery? No, it is an expression of reverse logical connection, implying that there are no other rights but to work harder and better. The final conclusion ("the right to self-criticism") serves as a premise which reverses the whole chain of previous proofs regarding how wonderful and free life in our country is. The thought proceeds along the line from the end to the begin-

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ning. Correspondingly, the press is constructed and read according to the principles of reversed order. Freedom is turned into slavery, as if it were the most natural thing, peace becomes war, and poverty is transformed into wealth.

On this broad base, the joke is created. It is like the forecast regarding life under communism. Everyone will have a private helicopter and a television set. On television you will see that people are buying flour in Tula, a provincial Russian town. You will get into your helicopter and go to Tula for flour. . . .

It is axiomatic that the joke's most important part is its unexpected crowning ending, which begins the actual process of composition, proceeding from the end back to the beginning. In this respect, communism, as the ideal tailpiece of world history, offers many possibilities. Following common logic, one can start at the end and go back to the beginning—from the ideal, fantastic goal to its crude transformation into contemporary reality.

Jokes arise at the point where the everyday intersects with the supernatural, the trivial with the incredible, the near and familiar with the distant and foreign. The zone of total alienation is not fertile ground for the joke, nor is too much proximity, nor is the narrator's identification with the hero of the story. Perhaps this can help explain the peculiar character of joking hyperbole: the hyperbolization of the small and petty. Modeled on school physics problems, all the jolly riddles about defining "super-noise," "super-greed," "super-impudence," "super-induction," and so on, fall into this category. Another example is the competition among nations about which is the most inventive in such areas as deftness, boldness, durability, feminine charm, hunger, dreadful suffering, for that matter, in anything. The competition is usually won by a Jew—a Jew is eating a bowl of compote with a fly in it; he eats the fruit and sells the fly to a Chinese or a Russian; he wins first prize at the International Hunger Competition, having painted an emaciated buttocks with its crucial aperture tightly covered by a cobweb. In these examples, a petty topic or object has been represented in its supernatural aspect, without ceasing to be petty.

Correspondingly, certain kinds of characters and classes of people have become heroes and stereotypes of the jokes. They occupy a special position, although it is close to ours. It is simultaneously high and low, different from our own position, and includes our sense of self both as primordial "self" and the imaginary "other." This paradoxical relationship is the source of a large series of jokes about generals, drunkards, crazy people, Jews, mothers-in-law, women cheating on

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their husbands and vice versa, and children-adult reversals. Rulers are exceptional people, but jokes about them are also the result of their relative proximity to us, expressed by such things as obligatory cliches that have trickled down into our Soviet everyday life. Apparently there were no jokes about Hitler in Russia: he was too alien, but there are as many as you might want about Lenin. Most of them are intimately tied to subjects stuck in our teeth: the armored car, the mausoleum, Lenin's celebrated simplicity and modesty.

In connection with all of this, I would like to say something about Vassily Ivanovich Chapaev, the leading hero of the contemporary joke. Chapaev's fictional life passed through several stages and changes. He is a legendary figure, whose soldiers' tales presented him as a folk hero in the manner of Stepan Razin (the Cossack leader of a seventeenth-century lower class rebellion) and Ermak Timofeevich (the legendary conqueror of Siberia). There is also the artistically pale yet truthful documentary image of Chapaev as a peasant guerrilla leader during the Civil War, the politically uneducated but charismatic hero of Furmanov's novella. He is given a full-blooded and heroic representation in a well-known film where he embodies a mixture of fearlessness and illiteracy, military leadership and peasant naiveté, generosity, and capricious despotism. And finally, in the last period of his life, he is the hero of the joke, which appears to be a further development of the film image. The origin of the Chapaev joke also seems to be related to the 1967 celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution and its flurry of clichés. The Chapaev jokes first appeared at that time.

Appropriately, there arises a question regarding causality: was it only the separation from the crowd's idol and illusions about the past that resulted in the long and brilliant series? In some sense, Chapaev remains a positive character, perhaps the only one to do so in the joke. Strange as it may seem, he persists as a folk hero, although turned inside out, combining dumbness, courage, ignorance and simplemindedness with a down-to-earth intelligence. He is reminiscent of the fairytale fool, but without his victorious halo, playing strictly a buffoon's role. Comparing his image to that of Lenin's in a parallel set of jokes, we immediately note our undeniable preference for Chapaev. In spite of his foolishness, his representation is marked by kindness, indulgent tolerance, and people's reassuring and teasing love for him. Probably this is so because Chapaev's image is still dear to our hearts and our childhoods, and his legendary personage is highly original and vividly picturesque. As a result, he is the comic mask of our day, most abundant in rich

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possibilities, which has gathered around itself a multiplicity of plots. The image participates in a broader aesthetic game than the actual Chapaev did, and it does not matter that the fictional image has been radically revised.

I won't quote any Chapaev jokes, since they are so well known, but will refer to a model which, in fact, is no longer about Chapaev and is a typical example of the joke inside the joke. Recently the Soviet government decided to ascertain the most popular joke of our time. All existing jokes were gathered and recorded, and the list was fed into a computer. In a few hours, the machine gave its answer, which was a universal computer superjoke: "Vassily Ivanovich Chapaev is walking on Red Square and meets Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who asks Chapaev, 'Say, Abram, so it's time to emigrate to Israel already?'"

It used to be that historical songs and legends were composed immediately after important events. For a time, the *chastushka,* a short street ditty, usually a quatrain, that appeared originally in the late nineteenth century, was a response to this general need. Now the joke has taken on that role completely and is the only contemporary folk genre in Soviet Russia. The only other literary form that could compete with the joke is the underworld song, but it is declining as a genre. The joke, however, is alive and well. God grant it good health.

During the last quarter century, it has shown a greater interest in history than before. Both recent and more remote facts and historical personages have come to life in the joke: Stalin's death, the Lenin cult, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, the more remote yet Russian interpretations of Gomulka, Dubček, Husak, Moshe Dayan, Nehru, Nixon, and President Svoboda. (In the joke, "President Svóboda is a pérceived necessíty"; the name Svoboda means freedom in Russian, only the stress in Czech falls on a different syllable. Under the impact of the Czech stress, all of the stresses in the joke are misplaced in reference to a stock motif, that of the Soviet leaders' uncultured speech. Philosophically, the joke parodies Engels' definition of freedom.) There are responses in the form of jokes to the Soviet hijacking case, Jewish emigration, dissidents, *samizdat,* and the role of Sakharov in Russian history. Concurrently the joke is penetrating contemporary Russian literature more and more. It is enough to name Galich, *Chonkin* (Vladimir Voinovich), the novella *Moscow to the End of the Line* (Venedikt Erofeev), "Buddha's Smile," which is a chapter from Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle,* Aksyonov, and Zinoviev.

Sometimes it seems that the joke will be the only survivor of our

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miserable age and thereby will immortalize it. However, even the joke eludes us. Similar to real folklore or oral poetry, it fades on paper, losing its live voice, facial mimic, and the gestures that accompany it. Sometimes, in the manner of pantomime, these are its only expressive means. Unlike other folkloric genres, which are meant to be repeated many times over and fixed in folk memory, the individual joke disappears quickly and is replaced by a new, more pointed and current response. Its significance, vitality, mobility, penetration, and historicity are all a function of the joke's novelty. So is its fleeting nature. It flares up in a flash, burns quickly, and is forgotten. Although at times we like to remember old jokes, we always want to hear the latest edition. It is different with songs or fairytales, and it is not accidental that narrators of "bearded" jokes are usually ridiculed. There is even a joke regarding old jokes, which serves our need to ridicule, while commemorating simultaneously the splendid genre. The story about the Egyptian mummy is a common response to a bearded joke: "On a dig in Egypt somebody uncovered a mummy with its hand shut tight in a fist. When the hand was forced open, a scrap of papyrus was found with your joke on it!"

If it weren't for one more characteristic feature of the joke, perhaps the most important one, we could end our story here. I am referring to the joke's philosophical relation to the world, to things, to the old and the new, when the new is a variation on the old but is nevertheless a *new* variant. We can imagine the joke in the form of an endless chain which connects just about all possible human situations. It can be likened to Mendeleev's periodic table of elements which has empty spaces for new valences as if for new jokes. The heading for this chart consisting of humorous parables would read something like "Human Existence" or "Human Reality."

Because of its all-inclusiveness and philosophical tranquility in relation to a dramatic event, the joke is perceived as a source of wisdom. In this context, wisdom coincides so completely with humor that humor becomes the fountain of wisdom. We discern in the joke an indulgent and superior vision of life. It seems to me that this characteristic feature is related to the reversibility of all phenomena and things, an inversion which controls the soul of the joke and is incarnated in it—narratively, verbally, and materially—as in an appropriate form. As a result, the joke becomes an advisor and helper, an explanation and comfort in the most critical situations, as well as for all occasions. Joke punch lines have become proverbs, contemporary idioms, and even wise sayings which are used to resolve arguments and contradictions, sometimes conclusively exhausting them.

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For the sake of brevity, I will cite several such aphorisms which move the speaker and listener to reconstruct and mentally see the whole preliminary plot and structure of the implied joke, the whole clockwork which has brought it to life and set it in motion. The "initiated," that is, those who know and remember the premises that underpin these formulas, can catch the meaning immediately, interpreting the image as a kind of universal idea from only the punch line, such as "Not a bad beginning of the week!" or "And our life is any different?"

One refers to a joke where a Jew is being taken to his execution. He asks the guard what day it is and is told that it's Monday. "Not a bad beginning of the week!" quips the man going to his death. The initiated know that the other punch line belongs to a joke about Rabinowitz, who is trying to escape across the border but is seen by an approaching guard. Looking for a way out, Rabinowitz spots a pile of dog shit, drops his pants and squats over it. The guard asks him what he is doing, and he tells the guard that he is attending to his bodily needs. "But that's a pile of dog shit!" says the guard. "And our life is any different?" asks Rabinowitz.

In spite of its cutting straightforwardness, the truth the joke offers always has a multiplicity of meanings and touches several grooves in our consciousness, among them the feeling of sadness and hopelessness regarding our condition. I will try to illuminate this with two concluding examples. The first joke is about universal injustice and at the same time about the victory of art over reality. If you wish, it is the theme of "Mozart and Salieri": Two Voroshilov marksmen (of the prestigious Soviet paramilitary organization) are walking down Tverskoi Boulevard past the Pushkin monument, and one says to the other, "How unjust! It was Dantes who hit the mark, but the monument was raised to Pushkin." (Pushkin was killed by Dantes in a duel.)

The second joke, which is also replete with sadness and wisdom, offers advice about what we should do in the most unpleasant and desperate situation. When there is no salvation, and life seems dreadful, everything becomes obscene. It is at this point that the joke appears to be a consolation, for it has crossed all boundaries of decency or propriety. Before us is a most gloomy vision of life but one which is healed by laughter, by art's humor and nothing else. Question: What should a girl who is being raped do? Answer: Relax and try to enjoy it.

I offer this attitude as a recommendation to the readers of my essay.

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# FICTION

## Yuz Aleshkovsky

## FROM *THE BOOK OF FINAL STATEMENTS*

*Malykin worked as a tractor driver harvesting potatoes. At noon he went to lunch and after lunch, without the permission of the kolhoz directors, began harvesting potatoes from the private plots of the kolhoz workers and, having gotten drunk, broke the tractor.*

*The president of the kolhoz, Demyanov, and the brigade leader, Koletvinov, rebuked him for having obstructed work in the kolhoz fields. In response to this, Malykin began insulting them in unprintable words and then, leaving the tractor out, went home.*

*After some time, Malykin, having armed himself with a pistol which he kept at home illegally, came to the kolhoz field and shot at Demyanov but missed. The second shot he aimed at Koletvinov, wounding him in the left buttock.*

### Defendant Malykin's Final Statement

Citizen Judges: Last year at the summons of the party I served as vice president of the district committee for the election of the peoples' judges, namely you. The population of our region generally has a poor turnout at various elections, since it regards election days as a kind of holiday and manages to get crocked on home brew early in the morning. After this political merriment, you have to drag the ballot box with the ballots along impassable mud, or through our Tambov snow drifts, or sometimes in the chilling rain. As if dragging the ballot box weren't enough, you come into some cocky citizen's shack, and he starts carrying on like a downright dissident, saying he won't vote, even if you cut him down on the spot, until the management sends him an order for ten sheets of roofing iron. His roof, he says, leaks from election to election and from May 1 to November 7.

But, he says, if someone in my family gives in and votes, I consider the vote invalid, and I'll even put my old lady's mouth upwards under the stream from the ceiling and let her gather unto herself the heavenly moisture.

There are some more decent sorts of blabberers, but each and

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Editor's Note: Translated from the Russian by Priscilla Meyer.

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every one of them tries to wangle some hard-to-get item or certificate out of the kolhoz. They exploit the fact that we have a competition for who can get out the biggest vote. They know there'll be some pickings from the regional committee—various forms of acknowledgement and cushy work assignments.

What do I mean by this? That I used to crawl to the election point dead drunk, dragging the ballot box on my back, and that the goddamn voters try to heave all sorts of crap into it. It gets heavy. Sometimes they shove broken glass in there, because a lot of glass gets busted during a drunk, and you can't find any new glass in the whole region. "All the glass went into the Olympics," they say, "cement and steel too; wait 'til we recover from building stadiums and restaurants for jumpers and runners. Better you should have mud on your face here, than us in the international arena as the luminary of the whole world in the struggle for health and physical culture of the workers."

And actually, Citizen Judges, if it weren't for me in these elections of yours, maybe you wouldn't be judges, and there would be absolutely no one to judge me besides my own incorruptible conscience.

Behind the very election center an attack on me was effected by unknown individuals in the form of blows and insults to my holy duty as vice president. The unknown individuals had stretched over their faces torn women's stockings like in a French film with Belmondo in the lead role. They beat me on the head and on the cheeks, that is, on my puss, with a black shoe from the same film, saying cynically, "Take this, blondie. . . ." Then followed a swear word which I can only utter behind doors closed to the public.

But I saved the box with the votes and various garbage at the risk of my life, although the ballots did get wet, and we quickly substituted clean ones for them, put the signatures in ourselves, and so on. It's in capitalist countries that a ballot can disappear at the whim of the corrupt politicians, but with us ballots don't disappear. To each spoiled one we answer with five new ones. How do you like that!

So because of all this, Citizen Judges, I count on your party mercy to carefully examine my case which I consider a crime not against the laws of our motherland but against her enemies—President Demyanov and brigade leader Koletvinov. I request a break for the satisfaction of needs, that is, number one and number two, in view of the damage done to my intestines by poor nutrition during the preliminary investigation and of the blows administered to my

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kidneys by officer Prokhov during his arrest of me in a drunken condition.

Citizen Judges, it is known to the whole world that the harvesting of potatoes in our country (as distinct from capitalist countries) is a respected and universal enterprise, because the kolhoz chronically lacks its own population.

We, the Soviet people, are obliged to maintain an army to defend the achievements of the workers of our brother countries, and a militia with traffic police, and various inspectors, not to mention the private car drivers of the city and country administrations. But I won't go on here about the useless parasites. And how many people do we have taking excellent care of the cosmos? How many brilliant spies do we maintain in the capitalist countries to inform us about imperialism's preparation for world war? How many writers do we have, artists, secret agents, various scientific workers, students, and other do-nothings?

In the last five years our village alone has given the economy 84.5 soldiers and officers, six policemen, twelve prisoners of various sorts, and three waiters from the drunken establishments of Tambov, not counting the taxidrivers, railroad workers—may they drop dead—and students of the literary institute in Moscow who don't want to work in the fields but get a ruble and forty kopeks for a rhyme. Bastards. There's no one to make up limericks, let alone plant or dig potatoes. Also at various stations in Moscow, three of our Komosomol girls were arrested for prostitution and were sent under convoy to their native kolhoz to milk cows instead of depraved business-trippers.

In a word, if it weren't for the help of the city, our famous potatoes would rot at the root. The proletariat comes, students come, and various egghead scholars, including genuine Jews, one of whom traitorously took our best Komosomol Katka Zvorykin, in the guise of his spouse, off to the land of Israel, from where she's sending her girlfriends indestructible jeans and paint for their shameless eyes, and spreading slanderous rumors about their kibbutz-kolhozes over there. There, she says, a hundred people harvest more agricultural produce than five hundred in three kolhozes do here and still have their faces full of sour cream while sending produce to Europe. Isn't that slander?

So our helpers come out from the city, which could never happen anywhere in the capitalist countries, because there it's dog eat dog, and one man treats another like a wolf, a jackal, and a snake. Just let the ruling republican party try going to someone and asking

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him to go harvest corn in his neighboring state. He'll send the president himself you know where on the spot, and no one will take him to court for it, because of the indifference of the organs of justice to the condition of American agriculture. And the president won't have anyone to complain to. He can't complain to himself! Five years ago I once told regional secretary Fedkin to go to a certain indecent place, and he telephoned Tambov right off and ordered the investigator to come for me to roast me in the cooler for five years or so. Lucky that the very same day the secretary himself went to jail for driving into a herd of yearlings in a drunken state and wounding the shepherd with a crank handle. But okay . . .

As you know, the party permits the kolhoz workers to produce their own potatoes for additional nourishment and sale in city markets, since 70 percent, so they say, of government-produced vegetables go to waste for nothing from poor storage and inhuman transport. The pigs don't even get it, let alone Soviet people and capitalist diplomats who often turn up in the markets of the city of Moscow and engage you in provocational discussions in Russian and sometimes in other foreign languages. We're used to it.

But what do the party and the president say to the harvesting gathering? They say: "First we will fulfill our harvesting plan. We will provide our motherland with potatoes so that it won't have to import them from Poland and inflame the Polish scourge of Solidarity and other enemies of socialism. . . . Only then will you attend to private agriculture and market speculation. He who puts himself above the party and the people for the sake of his own material egoism will be as a wolf unto people, and we will take away his land and give it to the outstanding workers. The land was given into the hands of the people in 1917 not so that they could do anything they liked with it while giving the government the finger on the sly. This is no America where the landowner farmers blackmail the president; he even lifts the boycott on selling wheat to the motherland of socialism, which our country never would have done; it wouldn't trot in the reins of the kulak, if we, of course, were feeding bread to America and not they to us, in light of the inevitable pressure on the luminary of communism and the guarantor of world safety for the production of bombs and rockets and such-like solidarity with the enemies of the U.S.A. . . . Everyone to the fields. . . . We will not permit the harvest, I mean the loss of the harvest. . . . We will put 25 percent more than the plan demands into the granaries of the motherland. . . ."

But what sense is there in all this blab if the city people consider

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us country people parasites riding into communism on their hump and extorting bestial prices from them for potatoes in the winter markets and in the spring when the government potato turns into horrible moldy rot? We village people curse the city folks since we produce meat and milk but still have to tear around Moscow and wait our turn in lines for vegetables ourselves, because in the village store they only sell cans of seaweed. Even the flies in the village store won't fly anywhere near it but keep close to the president's office, where he and his brigade leaders grease their red faces at dinner licking the bones of the lamb they've snitched.

So what's the people to do with its dear potato if the rain, let's say, does it in? What's it to do, I repeat, if instead of black flies, white ones suddenly appear and cover all the tops with powder, and before you know it, frost grips the field?

And the president and the red-faced party committee zip around in their jeeps bursting their iron-lined throats: "All hands to the harvest . . . not a minute's delay . . . work quickly and without spoilage . . . we will dedicate our valiant labor to the anniversary of the revolution . . . we will quiver fraternally on our work shift in honor of Soviet-Polish friendship. . . ."

So one time, as a renowned tractor driver and mechanic of labor procedures, I say: "What's going on in one-sixth of the world and in the two-sixths more we conquered after sixty-five years of Soviet power? Our submarines hang around under water for half a year at a time like Captain Nemo. Number one. We're shooting the cosmos full of holes with our rockets, so that hostile whirlwinds tear in through the holes and ruin the harvests with the crappy climate. That's two. We have so many bombs that they say you could shove the planet earth together with our district of Tambov off its axis, and not one tractor station could save the situation. That's three. But why can't we think up a potato combine? What's the point of chasing doctors of science out into the fields to harvest? You'd do better to sit them down—the parasites—to the drawing boards and not let them leave their work until they produce a design—the bastards—for a clever machine which is essential to our people and the whole socialist camp."

Well, at this the red-faced party committee came after me with his fists, and I take up a crow bar, and with this crow bar in my hands, I hear out the usual blab about capitalist encirclement and the necessity for increasing military strength in preparation for the victory of the workers over the whole earth's globe. I listen, and I

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think, it's really strange. It's clear from the map that it's not them surrounding us now, but we're squeezing them everywhere, in Africa, in Asia, in Europe, and even in America itself. But they've got a potato combine, while besides tanks and planes and figure skating, we haven't got a fig. How can this be?

It's understandable that the directors couldn't help harboring wild dogs at me in its heart. An accident helped them out. The weather conditions turned unbelievably terrible, with rains, winds, and frosts at night. The roads were washed out, and what kind of roads we have, you know as well as I do. But here I understand the arguments of the party committee. If the enemy attacks us and manages to penetrate deep into the Tambov district, we'll meet him with such roadlessness and brigades of Ivan Sussanins [a peasant who deliberately misled some of Napoleon's officers into the woods where they perished during the war of 1812] that the enemy's compasses will only crack and their needles whirl in terror. The enemy will be forced to begin road construction all over Russia, and we don't have the least intention of getting in his way, using Kutuzov's tactic. Let him pave our highways and pour enemy asphalt on our pot holes. Pour away, dear comrade. And when you've finished, we'll chase you along the central Russian highway through the Tambov district to the very border and that way kill two birds with one stone: we'll deal with the invaders and finally get some roads without putting the people's dough into expensive road building and cutting off the means of support for defending our motherland.

That's about the way the party committee talks when he carries out political discussions stone drunk in the field camps.

In a word, the government also has to bring in the potatoes, of course, and not spite itself, so that it won't have to cart potatoes from the city in the winter. It's a disgrace to the peasant.

So my heart is full. I don't sleep for four days. I grab a couple of hours, I rush back and forth with four trailers between the fields and the store house. The kolhoz girls are standing with sticks over the doctors of science, the office rats, and the depraved students who drag our milkmaids away from their work to dances and drinking parties. Because without these incentives, the city dwellers don't want to work but only to guzzle vodka, dump on the government in an uncensored fashion, and sing songs by Vladimir Vysotsky [a semi-official bard whose songs painted a dim picture of Soviet life], may he rest in peace.

Of course, I drink too, regularly taking a slug from my soldier's

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flask. Without drinking we'd lose our merciless workers' struggle against hostile nature.

And the idea came into my drunken but honorable head of how to reconcile the dual harvesting of kolhoz and private crops by the kolhozniks.

You wretches, I say, dig away at your own potatoes at night, put them in sacks, mark them, and me and Fedya the shepherd will whip them off the next day at lunch time to the school, so that the fruit of the sinful earth can dry under a good roof. Then I'll make up all the lost time so as not to betray the people or the motherland, since I observe a monolithic unity between them even when they're drunk. And, of course, you'll pay me and Fedya slightly for the work, because that law about work is all kaygeebee, but me, I'm in favor of pay for your labor. And there wasn't the least anti-Soviet thing in these words of mine, which I went and did. That is, I helped my countrymen save the whole harvest, or else it would have rotted at the root during that agricultural crisis.

And what's so terrible about my tearing myself apart, so to speak, on two fronts, and then going home to lunch? I'd been drinking for a week without eating, and my guts began rumbling at the wheel. It was so bad I didn't make it home, I got dizzy, my whole being was pierced with pain, and I slammed the radiator right into a lamp post which they'd taken the bulb out of to save energy. If they hadn't taken it out, maybe I wouldn't have hit it. I'm an experienced tractor driver.

Then that drunk, President Demyanov, called me a wrecker's spawn and a chicken's asshole, and the brigade leader threatened to deprive me of my night pay, my overtime, the medal for distinguished service they'd promised me, my private garden, and also to take away my lawful wife so that I wouldn't shame her by doing lousy work on the side.

This is where my patience gave out, and I declaimed some unprintable expressions and also some limericks in which our people choicely brand our presidents and brigade leaders parasites and swamp snakes.

In response, Demyanov and Koletvinov, who had quickly been joined by the red-faced party committee, administered a series of provocational blows to me, one of which landed on my already diseased teeth and another below the belt.

So that's what you're like, I think, you don't give a damn about the production front and the private peasant sector, the three of you

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fucking me over in view of the whole world and the doctors of science smeared in mud! That's the way you bastards handle the mechanic who neither eats nor sleeps but only pushes on in the field slugging down rotgut for inspiration? That's all you care for my devotion to the voters, who barely hand in their votes to their own Communist Party anyway?

There is a limit, Citizen Judges, to the patience of even a Soviet man, who is more patient than the man living in the conditions of bourgeois exploitation and shameful bondage. There is a limit. Why couldn't they have treated me decently? "Don't kill yourself with overwork, Malykin, as if you were at war. Accidents happen . . . repair the tractor . . . have a bite to eat . . . recover your strength, you drunken trade unionist . . . and make up for your lost time. . . ."

That's how they should have treated me, and not busted up my radiator, that is, my face, until it didn't look anything like its former self. And they told me, despite the protests of the doctors of science, to get out of the fields and go to the devil's dam and a bit farther.

The pistol was entrusted to me three years ago by our district police officer. Then he died of appendicitis, and I didn't feel like giving the pistol up to the new one. Besides, the dead police officer was a relative on my wife's side.

I carried the pistol on me exclusively during the preparations for various elections to the organs of power and to the local soviets to defend myself against incensed voters, which is where I began my explanation.

Sometimes a voter would heave a stool at me and say, "Don't come to me, you snake, until there's port in the village store."

And I would grab my cannon and answer, "Have you had a whiff of this, you speculator in our temporary difficulties? I'll knock the political activism out of you, you bastard. . . ."

But as for shooting, I never shot until they beat me up in the field and smeared me all over with you know what in front of everybody. I did wing a few at the shameless insulters, but I didn't aim at the important organs like the heart, the brain, and below the belt. I request that the court take into account that I completely missed the president and consider that shot invalid. I demand it be excluded from the sentence. I'm also not much guilty of the rest, being an honest man and tractor driver . . .

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## Cornelius Castoriadis

# DEFENDING THE WEST

"Man is born free and is everywhere in chains," wrote Rousseau. No: no natural law or divine plan causes man to be born free or not. But, if he is in effect everywhere in chains it is because he is born amidst chains ready to bind him, chains that educate him so that he asks to have them put on. Immaterial chains above all, which are not forged by one social group in particular. No single group is capable of keeping guard twenty-four hours a day over a society whose vast majority rejects such domination.

That domination derives from an establishment, from established law, from meanings and mores already instituted and sanctioned. The most "egalitarian" savages are at least as alienated or preconditioned as were Roman slaves or medieval serfs. None of these groups could think that the social structure could be questioned and changed. Almost everywhere, almost always, socialized human beings—who would not be human without that socialization—have not been able to exist except by completely interiorizing the establishment, by completely submitting themselves to it. This naturally entails thinking that the institutions of *others* are necessarily inferior, strange, monstrous, and diabolical.

Being heteronomous is the fate of man and reveals the intangible nature of extant institutions, the beliefs of the tribe. It has been, almost everywhere, almost always, the reality of human societies.

That condition—"normal" over the course of most of history—was only really broken in Europe. It was only in Europe, in Greece at first and later in western Europe, that a society was created that was capable of discussing itself and questioning itself. It was here that such questions as, "What is just?" or, "What is true?" arose and disturbed society, not as disputes for court philosophers or as interpretations of a sacred text, but as questions that shaped social struggle and political activity. It is for this reason that social strife has not been blandly tolerated: it has led to revolts that go on for decades in-

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stead of days; it has been the cause of change more fundamental than mere palace revolts; it has not produced new prophets or new religions but political activity. Politics as a collective activity explicitly oriented toward changing institutions, philosophy as an illimitable questioning, and, above all, their cross pollination and solidarity appeared here. Here also was born the project of individual and collective autonomy, carried along by the struggles of peoples to achieve democracy, a project whose content has come to be of concern to all sectors of society as an institution (above and beyond narrowly "political" issues). And it was in Europe also that, for the first time, the questioning of established institutions, which implies their being relative, brought about the recognition that all cultures are in fact equal.

Understood in this way, Europe in fact is not a geographic or ethnic entity. One of the strongest moments of European creation took place in New England, at the end of the eighteenth century, and its reverberations are still being felt, even though Europe itself has not been terribly lively now for almost two centuries. Japan, the dissidents of the Peking Wall, millions of people scattered all over the globe belong to that moment of European creation, but not white South Africa.

Europe, of course, has not engendered only that quest for freedom. It was also the social-historical scene in which capitalism was created, a mad but effective project for the unlimited expansion of "rational" control. And it was the matrix in which imperialism was born, the idea of control on a planetary scale. And, finally, it gave birth as well to a twisted, inverted, monstrous form of the capitalist project, totalitarianism. No European should display false modesty with regard to that last little matter. Everywhere and always, men have been capable of infinite cruelty to each other, but Auschwitz and the Gulag belong exclusively to us.

Europe didn't invent war, hatred, racism, servitude, wars of extermination, or forced acculturation: history overflows with these things. Europe has practiced them, as have other societies, but Europe's unique quality is that it has answered and fought all of those horrors from within its own borders.

The project of autonomy, born in Europe, cannot be said to be a reality because to call Western societies "democratic" is either an abuse of language or mystification. "European" societies remain mixed, with *dual institutions,* where social strife, domination by bureaucratic capitalism, imperialism with regard to the Third World co-

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exist with democratic elements which struggling peoples have succeeded in imposing on the institution of society. They are, rigorously speaking, liberal oligarchies. But the project of autonomy continues to vex them and has already changed them substantially. Institutions and laws allow individuals to lead their lives, more or less, as they please and to act politically if they desire; the very existence of certain individuals constitutes an answer to authority—to oppose the powers that be, to fight against injustice even if it does not affect one personally is not merely a matter of form or ritual. And it does make a profound difference with regard to the very texture of society. Now all this did not simply spring from the earth, nor was it granted by God; and it certainly was not produced by capitalism. It was the product of what in many cases were age-long struggles, the price paid with mountains of victims and oceans of blood. It did not transform "European" societies into ideal or autonomous societies, but it did create an extremely precious (because it was improbable and fragile) historical foundation on which something else could be built.

What in today's world is mortally threatened is not United States imperialism or the governments of torturers that depend on the United States. The replacement of America by Russia, the replacement of Argentine policemen by some of Chernenko's colleagues would do nothing but raise the system of domination to a greater degree of perfection. What is being menaced is the democratic element in "European" nations and what that element contains as a memory, as a source of inspiration, the source of hope for all the peoples of the world.

That element is menaced first, militarily as well as politically, by the Russian system whose internal dynamics propel it toward world domination and which views as a mortal danger the mere existence of societies where genuine rights and liberties exist. (That is, by the way, the lesson taught by Jaruzelski.)

That element is secondly menaced by a Third World with three times as many people as the "European" nations. Of course, European creations have penetrated there as well, but that penetration is strongly unbalanced. The use of jeeps, automatic rifles, advanced methods of torture, and the brutal manipulation of the media has been assimilated everywhere with a speed and facility infinitely greater than the assimilation of democratic attitudes and critical spirit. From our vantage point, it would seem that Amindadaization (or Qadhafyization, or Khomenyization, or Galtierization) represents for the countries of the Third World the fastest way downhill.

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That democratic element is, finally, menaced by a process of social decay whose speed is accelerating. Political society is breaking down into lobbies. Political and social conflict, evanescent, is giving way to the defense of mere regional and vested interests. Irresponsibility is increasing in all senses and in all sectors of society (from ministers of state to people driving cars, from writers to mailmen). Political imagination and creativity have disappeared.

The equation the most daring "pacifists" have attempted to establish, between "Russian imperialism" and "United States (or Western) Imperialism" is absurd. Politically, there is nothing to defend—aside from human lives—in Russian society. In "European" societies, there are many things to defend, things which, if destroyed, may never exist again.

But what there is to defend cannot be defended by the states and governments as they exist. First, because they are organically incapable of doing it: the decay of Western managerial skills and the mechanisms of management in society is neither accidental nor passing. The signs of decay are innumerable: from the aberration of today's economic "policies" to the lack of a strategy towards Russia, from the absurdities of United States rearmament, to the permanent sniping that takes place among the supposed "allies." Western "policy" with regard to the Third World is the principal ally Russian penetration has in those countries: the events taking place in Central America demonstrate this to the point of caricature.

Next and most important, things are falling apart because everyone is defending something else. It's a fact that we can stop supporting Franco, Salazar, Papadopoulos, the Brazilian generals, probably tomorrow Pinochet as well—but that support is never withdrawn from a communist regime once it is established. But neither that fact nor official rhetoric can mask the massive support Western governments supply to the dictatorial regimes of the Third World. (The hypocrisy of the French "left" in this instance is, as usual, particularly delightful. Many regimes supported by France in Africa have no reason to envy—that's the least one can say—their Latin American counterparts. And the African regimes depend much more for their survival on Paris than do the South American regimes on Washington.) Elementary realism indicates that, the more the confrontation with Russia intensifies, the more Marcos, Mobutu, and d'Aubisson benefit from the unconditional support of "democratic" governments. And the day is not far off when people will be asked to support Botha in the name of the democratic and humanistic values of the West.

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We cannot have any confidence in these states if we think in realistic terms, and we can feel no solidarity with them in terms of principles.

The defense of that which can be defended in "European" societies is not possible unless the peoples of those countries abandon their apathy and their sense of private rights (the disgraceful state of sleeping France offers today the most grievous example of both afflictions), unless they come to their senses, take on leadership roles in political activity, fight again to make history instead of submitting to it. If they do take these steps, decisive repercussions in Eastern Europe and in many nations of the Third World cannot fail to take place. If they continue as they are now, neither the Pershing missiles nor the MX will prevent the worst: total war or the gradual domestication of Europe, as a prelude to its total subjection by Russian strategic planning.

To work for that reawakening is the only *realistic* objective those who desire to defend the defensible in European history and society can espouse.

## Octavio Paz

## WHICH LATIN AMERICA?

Cornelius Castoriadis's essay appeared in a shorter form, in *Le Monde* some months ago. More than one of its ideas is applicable to the current situation in Mexico and Latin America in general. It is because of this relevance that we reproduced it in *Vuelta,* despite the fact that Castoriadis was writing basically for a European audience. In Europe the theme of the defense of the West is being widely discussed, and Castoriadis analyzes the simplistic theories mouthed by the right, the left, the pacifists, and the ecologists. These latter, by the way, equate, as do so many Latin American intellectuals, Russian totalitarianism with United States imperialism. Castoriadis

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Editor's Note: Translated from the Spanish by Alfred J. MacAdam.

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debunks the equation and demonstrates that the defense of Europe actually means the defense of ideas and institutions that were born in Europe and which have spread all over the world.

In the case of Mexico, as in other Latin American nations, democratic principles were implanted first by the Spaniards: municipal governments, courts, occasional judges, critiques of public office holders, and other forms of self-government and vehicles for criticizing central power. These elements of democracy were developed and radicalized successively by the Latin American thinkers of the Enlightenment, by (above all) the men who fought for the independence of our nation, and by those who brought about in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries democratic political reform. In this sense, Mexican democracy—or, to be precise, the always threatened pockets of democracy in contemporary Mexico—has been an original recreation, frequently a heroic recreation, of principles discovered by European intellectuals and nations in their struggle against the various forms of domination mankind has known since its beginnings. In Mexico, the defense of democracy is the defense of the heritage of Hidalgo, Morelos, Juárez, and Madero. Thus it should not be confused with a defense of United States imperialism or with the defense of conservative military regimes in Latin America. Nor should it be confused with complicity (active or passive) in the expansion of Russian totalitarianism in our continent.

The crisis of the capitalist system, which Marx and others predicted, was resolved in 1917, with the appearance of a new kind of society. Contrary to the precepts of Marx and the Russian revolutionaries, this new society is not and never has been socialist. Nor is it, as some left-wing intellectuals persist in saying, a bureaucratic degeneration of the Workers' State. And it is certainly not a society moving toward socialism. It is a new form of material, political, and economic domination, more cruel and much more absolute than oligarchic capitalism. It is a more complete, more savage despotism than any traditional dictatorship. Capitalism has coexisted with democracy; it has deformed democracy, but it has never suppressed it. Russian communism has rooted democracy out and has thus eliminated itself as a vehicle whereby all mankind might achieve freedom.

Like democracy, totalitarianism was also born in Europe. It was born twice, first in Germany and second in Russia. The Nazi version was defeated, but in Russia totalitarianism took hold and has now spread throughout the five continents. It is a genuine empire. The most active and effective agent in the expansion of Russian total-

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itarianism in Latin America is the regime of Fidel Castro, which has reproduced the bureaucratic-military structure of the Soviet Union. Cuban influence has been decisive in Nicaragua, where the process of Sovietization is quite advanced, as objective observers such as Alan Riding have reported. In El Salvador, the terrorist practices of the guerrillas reveal a totalitarian mentality. Once again, however, I hasten to declare that to criticize the process of Sovietization in Nicaragua or the totalitarian tendencies of the Salvadoran guerrillas does not mean I am closing my eyes to the crimes and atrocities of the Ríos Montts and the D'Aubissons. Miguel de la Madrid, the President of Mexico said not long ago, "It seems to me that intelligent action may assure the nationalist character of the revolutionary movements of Central America." I interpret that statement to mean that the regime in Nicaragua and the various revolutionary movements in Central America should shake off Russo-Cuban influence and domination. I would add that those groups should, aside from becoming nationalistic, become democratic.

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# POEMS

## Eugenio Montale

## THE HIDING PLACES II

I

The canebrake where I went to hide
was lapped by the sea when the waves were long
and only the foam got in, in dribs and drabs,
in that rehearsal of before and after the deluge.
Larvae tadpoles insects boxes without tops
even the frequent visits (one whole season)
of a hen with only one foot.
The canes sprouted their red plumes
in the proper season; beyond the garden wall
you could sometimes hear the flute-like song
of the solitary sparrow as the poet called it
but it was the variant ash-gray blackbird
that never has a yellow beak (I thought)
but makes up for it by singing
a theme I later heard again
on the gentle lips of a Manon in flight.
Wasn't it the flute of a lame hen
or another bird felled by a hunter?
I didn't think about it then
though the gun-rack at my house
displayed a muzzle-loading rifle
an unused weapon that once
had belonged to a crazy uncle.

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Only the voice of Manon, a voice emerging
out of a chorus of pimps
could bring me back after many years
to the canebrake by the sea and the lame hen
and make me understand the world had changed,
naturally for the worse, even if it was absurd
to regret or even remember
the missing foot she never knew was missing
who died in her bed of reeds
while the water-dipper rehearsed the song
which maybe you can hear in discotheques today.

II

A faintly gibbous moon
ignites the rocks of Corniglia.
The usual slate-colored bird
rehearses his homage to Massenet.
It's eight, isn't it time
to go to bed, children?

## Amy Clampitt

## FROM THE CORRIDOR OF A TRAIN

Yugoslavia: the scythe, the kerchief, the happy pink
of climbing roses, cherries ripening among green leaves,
childhoodlike as a medieval codex; storks, magpies,
yoked oxen; sentry boxes; roadside memorial wreaths
that fade and gather dust encased in plastic;

the ineradicable red of poppies, flimsy-petaled,
hardier than any culture, emblazoning the fields
of wheat and barley: proof of labor with the mattock,
of women hoeing in the fields all morning,
with respite under poplar trees at noon, the labor

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of whole families at evening. Seeing them lying
in the grass, seeing them in immemorial attitudes
of rest beside a river, under poplar trees
at evening, I find myself now half in love
with the hard fact of the ubiquity of labor

in the fields all day, with respite in the happy
pink of climbing roses, the ripening red-in-green
of cherries: half in love with the massed groves,
the long march of poplars on the Macedonian plain,
where minarets are rigid with the grief of Asia,

where gypsy vans give proof some part of all of us
would flee from labor, some part of all of us is
always far from home. People's democracies cannot undo
(or can they?), though they try, the fact of the sad heart
of Ruth, or of the beauty of this scene it is so easy

to be half in love with, as the train engine slows,
and from wild thickets bordering the embankment, so
close one can reach out and touch, the smell of bergamot
drifts in, birdsong detains the ears—a warbled *chook*
so immemorially loud I think, Can it be nightingales?

## Mark Rudman

## CIPHER

Some gnostic text asks
what can we, man, hope for
in our fallen condition,
and though I don't subscribe
to any shibboleths or hold
to any superstition, I agree.
The sages in the trees
whisper by the breezes

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and swear, what you once
called August is autumn.
Feel the bite in the air,
the chill in the canals
and estuaries,
fleeing, don't ask what:
this light lasts an instant
like your life,
and you, turning the pages
of your newspaper
never see how tenaciously
the shadows stay
before they are erased
by the dark,
how the broad-tailed hawk tests
that branch like an acrobat
and free-falls over the sedge
before swiftly ascending the spruces;
how the black bear
wads up the hedgehog's fur
and leaves it tangled in the kelp
and driftwood on the beach
without a track,
what riotous
unrequited creatures
go into the vegetable rows,
searching for corn
when storms are predicted.

## AUGUST IS NOT A MONTH

1

The season, to speak in the language of seasons,
is ending, and sweetly—with breezes.

The summer, which season it was, is ending
more sadly than any season will ever end.

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Pity—is a human mechanism.
And the body has its own time.

And the black bear falling
out of the pine tree

falls endlessly, prisoner of air—
of bars that stretch beyond the range of cells.

2

What hollow is not a grave?
What empty space? The earth

a hole, a passageway, with orbit
as a kind of falling off, falling away,

which the day, with its shadows, imitates,
and we, tied to distances, mimic.

No, I haven't lowered my expectations:
I've learned what not to expect.

3

And the freshness in the air
this morning after rain, the way

everything glistens, as though everything
were forgotten, even if it is,

the cruelty or disinterest of water,
reducing all news, all information,

to a mood, the baby knocking her head
against the stairs, crying, her mother

rising, the stanzas in Blok's Ravenna
going on about the sea erasing

all signs of life from mossy sepulchres, the sea—
eating away eternity.

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4

Dread at the edge of vision,
no longer mired in the strategems

of the self, or its weather, *the* weather.
And a hawk on a branch can prey.

Waiting is action. *Medaglia d'Oro* on
the stove quickens the listless afternoon.

Lying back in bed afterwards she says, "It's either
rain or pine needles falling on the roof."

The dark coming earlier by the day,
to say nothing of the hour, to say.

A kind of dread. The mere end of summer . . .
happens every year, wherever you are, and yet. . . .

The one thing these New England
villages lack is a square.

And yet—if I had some money
I'd stay the whole year.

5

There's always the chance there might be time
to begin, "Loin des oiseaux, des troupeaux,"

when the village girls disappear into the heather . . .
Another answer might slip unnoticed through the sluices.

Ladislas might be granted a passport.
Lulu, who hasn't had a drink in ten years

(though, in her own words, "still an alcoholic"),
could begin to conceive of life as a

"gift" rather than a "job."
There's always the chance, once the locks

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have been changed after the potlatch
(which cured our homesick possessions),

after the glasses have been converted to sand,
the wallpaper into birches, sound into cellos

and Madonnas into goldfinches, that someone
might hear, among the lightning fireflies,

among the harebells, in the same season
as this one, under Sirius, beckoning

wind in the stillness, wondering
what animal left these tracks. . . .

## Elizabeth Spires

## STORYVILLE PORTRAIT

*New Orleans red light district, 1912;*
*a photograph by E.J. Bellocq*

Her wish: to live in the body
as a visitor, mouth painted on,
breasts two cones of light,
legs closed against her sex,
and not a clue, not a sign
as she lies on the swirling wicker chaise
that she ever wanted anything but this.
A woman with a past but no future,
acquiescent to any mood,
who knows that acquiescence is her freedom.
The secret: to lie still, her hair
unfolding on the pillow, to lie still
and look at us until we understand
that look is our own conscience.

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Tired of the pose, her left hand
moves, blurring the slow exposure,
ring flashing out, fingers slowly dissolving.
Body and soul, thought and emotion, the present
moment and hereafter: two sides of a coin
spinning so fast distinctions are useless.
Her eyes invite, *defy,* any hand
to touch her, knowing the soul,
intact, *whole,* subsists entirely
on the meager rations of the physical,
that flesh is permeable to Time,
her visible hand a claw of light and shadow,
as, alone and strangely generous,
she shares the slow death of her body with us.

## Peter Sacks

## TRANSVAAL: UNDER FROST

Too early for room-service,
we hunch over coffee in the lobby,
warm our hands and slip out
to the car as newspaper
boys untie their bundles.

Eastward from Pretoria, the road
drops to a low mauve line of mist—
Machadadorp, the Kruger National Park,
and Mozambique—while all around
the pale lowveld gleams

dead-still apart from wispy
vapors drifting from cattle
as they breathe, or drop dung.
Past Witbank, bands of grey bleach
to a blacklight for the stubble

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of maize and thin, transparent scurf,
the occasional low thorn tree,
and now a windmill thawing
quietly—each token of an unseen
motion as of seasons undersoil,

a quickening motion no less in the people
we pass, the Sotho men with sticks,
the shrouded figures huddling over fires,
and children running, hands in pockets
against the cold, their bare feet falling

softly on the light dirt margins
of the road. Behind them,
like struck chords, the fences tremble
where they clambered through,
a splinter of the sun on every barb.

## Judith Yamamoto

## YOUNGEST BROTHER

he was always reading,
the sea serpents rising again out of a Trojan Sea,
and Mother let him bring his book to the table;
over the two bones of the forearm,
the watched and gentle skin

in the marble lights of winter, the horses were loosed,
running the crystal track,
the snow ruins;
the lanterns of their great eyes
stalling the fixed stone

in springtime, they came back to the barn
wilder for a while

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when the farm was sold,
youngest brother went to work for the Brodies;
voyages in a pale and shallow sky,
riders through memory and the sinking gates

the hired hands keep moving,
restless in the brown and settled country,
roads lined straight to the fields;
dying of sicknesses that hollow the blood,
mourn in odd sockets

the constellations drew back at dawn,
*taking the white light of his eyelids*

still, a siren of wind in the shaking aspens
still, the swaying and hushing of porch doors;
leaving behind no wives or children,
no runners to echo or breathe his soft steps,
will he fall into a country
even more treeless?

any large buffalo may be flicking his tail
in grassy regions,
in plateaus dragged by mute carcasses;
yet these same beasts
are trembling into extinction

and who will summon the youngest brother;
who call the strangers that follow our sleep?

## Robert Wrigley

## from *AUBADE FOR MOTHERS*

### The Ritual of Expulsion and Yearning

I am alone in the nursery corridor,
moving window to window,

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perusing each child's melon face.
I see my own in her bassinet
of aluminum and glass, see my own
faint in the finger-clouded pane.
The swell of my abdomen is gentler
today. There are spasms, intermittent,
expected, the ritual of expulsion and yearning.

The first memory is presence, first
sensation is loss. There are shapes,
colors, blood-muffle or chorus of winds.
In his swaddling before me, someone's
child flinches and feints, ducks
his wizened little face quick
behind his hands. What figures
can he see in his dreams? what terrors?
what sanctuaries of flesh and bone?

The nurses have cuffed my daughter's hands,
the slash of her newborn nails.
But for now she sleeps peacefully, open-mouthed,
lightly drooling. When I lean away
from the window, I see her
through the mark my forehead has left,
a fog of my own making,
through which she outwardly sails
on the certain and ritual waves.

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**Roger Shattuck**

# WRITERS FOR THE DEFENSE OF CULTURE

During the last week of June, 1935, the heat in Paris became pitiless. It was precisely the moment when scores of intellectuals from Europe and America and Asia had been summoned to that city to discuss the fate of their world. Inside the sweltering Palais de la Mutualité in the Latin Quarter, a mixed crowd of close to three thousand proletarians and mandarins, watched by muscular ushers, listened to the opening session. They anticipated excitement, portentous statements to match the turn of events. The newspapers under their arms were still discussing a financial panic and double cabinet crisis earlier in the month. The year had opened with the Saar plebiscite in favor of Germany and with Hitler's reestablishment of compulsory military service, followed closely by Ethiopia's second protest to the League of Nations about Mussolini's intervention in her affairs. In May, Laval, now premier, had brought forth the Franco-Soviet Mutual Aid Pact, a package which confounded the French communists, for it was accompanied by an unexpected statement from Stalin endorsing the long opposed French rearmament policy. The package also included the summary expulsion of Leon Trotsky after two years of political refuge in France. One wonders how many of the audience, most of them Soviet sympathizers, could acknowledge to themselves the murder of Kirov in Russia six months earlier and of the 105 people shot without trial to foil the "plot." Only a few days later this same auditorium in the Mutualité would house a mass meeting to celebrate the election in the Fifth Arrondissement of Paul Rivet, the first candidate in all Europe put up on a Popular Front ticket. Obviously the assembled intellectuals had multiple occasions to rise to.

It was Friday, June 21, a little after nine in the evening. When the people at the head table finally took their places, the audience could see the startlingly bald and ascetic head of the chairman behind the spider's web of microphones. He opened the session by reading in a beautifully modulated voice:

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> Literature has never been more alive. Never has so much been written and printed, in France and in all civilized countries. Why then do we keep hearing that our culture is in danger?

By a mixture of fate, chance, and calculation, the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture met in the very storm's eye of the thirties. The man who spoke the opening words was André Gide. His slightly oriental face wore the patina of a half-century of literary history. During the 1890s he had belonged to the group that listened to Mallarmé test the secrets and silences of poetry on Tuesday evenings. His novel about gratuitous murder and the rewards of being an imposter, *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914), had inspired the young devotees of dada and surrealism in the twenties; this same novel was now being revived in installments in *L'Humanité.* He had publicly proclaimed and defended his homosexuality in the twenties. For most listeners Gide, now sixty-six, had turned communist. His bourgeois public considered him a dirty old man all over again.

At the table with Gide sat Barbusse, pacifist and leftist hero since his novel *Under Fire* (1917); Malraux, already a legend at thirty-four with his fourth novel, *Days of Wrath,* just out; and Aragon, convert from surrealism to militant communism and editor of the monthly, *Commune.* After Gide's short welcome, telegrams of greeting and encouragement were read from Romain Rolland, hero of the pacifist left, and Maxim Gorki, both in Moscow.

The first speaker was a stooped but prickly Englishman, who talked inaudibly for twenty minutes about the close connection in England between traditions and liberties and the recent danger of censorship. With this speech E. M. Forster entered a kind of half-hearted political period which he later called *Two Cheers for Democracy.* There was more wistfulness than militancy in Forster's statement that he would perhaps be a communist "if I was [sic] a younger and braver man, for in communism I can see hope." He was followed by a heavyweight polemicist who brought the proceedings to life again with an impassioned simplification of Western history and by asking in effect for a division of the house. Julien Benda, author of *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927), rapped out a stinging speech affirming that, in the West, intellectual activity has traditionally stood apart from material and economic forces and inviting his communist colleagues to answer the question: "Does Lenin form a continuity with Montaigne, or is there a fracture?" Benda had, in fact, been mousetrapped. Several speakers had their answers ready:

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Marx belongs to the West; Benda had ignored half the Western tradition in order to make his case; the advances of modern science are based on the very materialism Benda scorns. They swarmed all over him.

The Congress was off, and it kept running for four more days with sessions at three in the afternoon and nine in the evening and an extra meeting Tuesday morning, Malraux presiding, on questions of organization. The speeches poured out, ranging from one minute greetings to a forty-five minute harangue by Barbusse, who mistook himself for the impresario of all left-wing culture. He emptied the hall. In the heat, more and more suspenders came into sight as jackets were taken off. Speeches in foreign tongues, followed by translation, provided long intervals for beer and conversation. Yet the enthusiasm kept returning. The German poet Regler made a fiery speech about the resistance to Hitler among writers still in Germany and dramatically handed to Gide and Barbusse token copies of underground pamphlets. "They're being circulated at this very moment." Spontaneously by all accounts, the audience rose at this point and sang the Internationale. Regler had in fact departed from his prepared text. Johannes Becher, later to become East German culture commissar, was outraged and hissed at Regler from the wings. "This Congress can't pretend to be neutral any longer." But Becher had nothing to fear. Efficiently organized, indulgently reported in most of the newpapers, capable of keeping its family squabbles in an inside pocket, the Congress appeared to be a great success.

But could such a congress succeed in being anything more than a mere epiphenomenon clinging to the surface of history? Could it ever constitute a nexus of real forces, a congress of *res gestae?* The thirties worried their way through a prolonged economic and political crisis that threw intellectuals and artists into a state of increasing tension. The Congress is a surprisingly clear window into that decade.

The year 1935 stands centered in a triple frame of events. In 1930, Europe felt the impact of the American *krach,* and it was the year that the Nazi party won six and a half million votes. But the German communist leader Thaelemann refused any united front against Hitler and proclaimed that the enemy was still capitalism and the fascism of social democracy. Until 1934 the famous "Third Period" of the Communist International called for the radicalization of the masses and no compromise with the noncommunist left. At the other end of the decade, complementing 1930, stand Munich and all that followed. Here is the first frame.

Hitler's installation as Chancellor in January 1933, and the

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Reichstag fire should have been enough to alert the astute to the true direction of things. But we know it was not; in May 1933 Gide was still able to write in his journal: "Excellent speech by Hitler to Reichstag . . . Everything remains to be seen." This date pairs off with the Proclamation of the Axis in November 1936. Here is the second frame.

In the mid-thirties, France had to assume cultural leadership of Europe by default. Writing from Moscow, Victor Serge referred to France as "an oasis . . . facing a crisis." Paris became the arena of events in great part because France was the only country where the Communist Party emerged from the Third Period of Comintern strategy with both numbers and prestige. In Italy and Germany, the communists had been liquidated or forced underground. But naturally in France a domestic confrontation was needed to produce a sense of urgency. Fascism in Germany and Italy could look remote and even comic until it struck in the streets of Paris. A highly complex and often contradictory sequence of events, including a financial scandal, a cabinet crisis, and a powerful Prefect of Police, led to what has often been interpreted as an attempted fascist coup against the Third Republic and the parliamentary system. That was February 6, 1934. We now know better; the fascist leagues and the Action Française had planned no such coup. Nevertheless, soldiers had to be brought in to protect the Chamber of Deputies from attackers on the Place de la Concorde. Pushed hard by demonstrators armed with iron bars and knives mounted on poles to disable the horses, the soldiers finally had to fire into the crowd. For all its confusion (there were quite a few communists among the rioters), this single night of fighting galvanized Paris into a series of frenzied counterdemonstrations, meetings, appeals to honor and to freedom, congresses, maneuvers, and reversals of policy. Out of that activity came the victory of the Popular Front and the Blum government. Politically and intellectually, the three years from the February riots in 1934 to the triumph and decline of the Popular Front in 1936 form the heartland of the decade, the unreal interval during which it seemed still possible to save European culture from totalitarianism without war, and even to assimilate the Soviet revolution into the Western tradition without more bloodshed. Here is the third frame.

In June 1936, huddled over his shortwave radio in Norway, Trotsky wrote his fifth successive pamphlet about the crisis and called it: "The French Revolution Has Begun." He was wrong: who knows what it would have taken to make him right. That was the way things felt in Paris also.

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Like most crises, this one arose out of the convergence of several strands that were difficult to distinguish at the time. In each instance, there appears to be a general European development with its French counterpart. Recognized late and poorly understood even when most blatant in its methods and ambitions, Italian and German fascism could still get away with almost anything in the mid-thirties. French fascism lumped together militant patriots organized in *ligues,* royalist maneuvering, and anti-Semitism inherited from the Dreyfus affair.

The second strand concerns the Third Communist International. Its strategy shifted drastically in May 1934 for reasons that remain cloudy. After six years of bitter attacks on the non-communist left came the apparent thaw—reconciliation, the Popular Front, "the hand outstretched" to socialists and even willing radicals, and an elaborate machinery of front organizations and cultural activities. In France, the party seemed to have jumped the gun, primarily through Barbusse's unpredictable yet successful activities. His Amsterdam-Pleyel movement against fascism and war in 1932 was the first of its kind. The noncommunist Vigilance Committee of Antifascist Intellectuals sprang up overnight after the February riots in 1934 and set up something like an interlocking directorate with a series of communist sponsored groups and meetings. The most important was the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (A.E.A.R.) that Vaillant-Couturier founded in 1932. The following year he assigned to Aragon the joint editorship of its monthly review, *Commune,* as well as responsibility for the Maisons de la Culture. Unlike the bleak years after 1927 when the surrealists had tried to find nourishment in a suspicious, badly split party, in 1934 the communists prepared to welcome the entire French Left into a huge pasture of antifascism. There, the Left's fondness for revolutionary slogans, its ignorance of Marxism, and its admiration for what it thought was happening in Soviet Russia led many individuals into highly irresponsible pronouncements and actions.

Fascism and communism were the principal ideological strands. But there was more. A genuine, vociferous opposition of militant Marxists and anti-Stalinist communists had existed since Trotsky's banishment—one might even say since Bertrand Russell's *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (1920) in which he called the Soviet system "moribund" because the Party had taken over. But Trotsky was everybody's devil—too eloquent, too shrill, too intellectual. Russell could not be counted on: by 1932 he was endorsing Soviet policies. (In 1945 he advocated preemptive war against the Soviet

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Union before it developed the atom bomb.) Other writers like Panait Istrati who produced evidence to show that the great experiment had gone sour were quickly labeled fascists. For those that wanted to look, magazines like *La Révolution prolétarienne* regularly furnished reliable information about what was happening in L'URSS—a combination of letters that almost reproduces the French word for bear. But few intellectuals ever heard about the case of Victor Serge, who had been imprisoned for months and then banished to Orenburg with no means of supporting his family. The Russians had the equivalent of unlimited political and ideological credit; they alone had achieved a revolution in the twentieth century. For the French Left in 1935, "revolution" meant the republican tradition threaded from 1789 through 1848 and the Commune, meant October in Russia, and also meant whatever the "Soviet experiment" had become since then. It made a heady brew. Few took the trouble to examine what had happened in twenty years, except to see that "Soviet power plus electrification" (as Lenin put it) seemed to have been a stunning success. The Big Bear had even joined the League of Nations in 1934.

The only organized group of self-professed Marxists to withdraw firmly and stridently from the Party, after having signed up, was the surrealists. They contrived to be *plus royaliste que le roi.* Their constant protests that the Party was compromising the true revolutionary cause looked like a caricature of the Trotskyite opposition (which they later joined) and had the same kind of shrill integrity.

The last strand is pacifism. Everyone but the extreme fascists opposed war. One of the semiscandals of the decade was the resolution adopted by the Oxford union in 1933, by 275 votes against 153, that they would "not take up arms for king or country under any circumstances." Moderates, antifascists, militant communists—they all considered themselves part pacifists under the skin.

These four strands and many more coincided in the mid-thirties in the sense that they reached peak intensities at approximately the same time. But the tensions they produced in historical events and in individual lives arose because these forces worked not in one direction but in contradiction; antifascism and pacifism were clearly at cross-purposes. The steady movement of intellectuals toward Soviet sympathies and communism at the very moment when Stalin was clamping his iron control over the Party through the purges, compromised the cause of antifascism. A whole generation of honest men tolerated in the Soviet Union the kind of conduct they condemned in Germany and would have opposed with their lives in

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their own country. The pacifists and the Trotskyite opposition could do little more than call down a plague on everybody's house.

Dissent and disarray characterize any ideological case. But the degree of polarization in 1935 almost equaled that caused by the Dreyfus case. In April Maurice Reynal founded an independent monthly newspaper to report on art exhibits and publish little-known writers like Artaud, Queneau, Michel Leiris, and Reverdy. Its name cannot be improved upon: *La Bête Noire.* But in its four numbers the paper found very little "artistic and literary" room to turn around in. The first number devotes the front page to a "mise au point" by Léon Pierre-Quint. It is a revealing text. He states that all literary and artistic schools are being deserted wholesale in favor of the fascist leagues or the Young Socialists. The young are no longer interested in surrealism, which has now "come into its own in the university." The public has become so militant in its views that it is no longer possible to make political jokes in the music halls and cabarets. An uncommitted writer, Pierre-Quint reports, is considered either an anarchist or a *petit bourgeois.* The fourth and last number of *La Bête Noire* was almost entirely devoted, not to an exhibit or a writer, but to the proceedings of the Writers Congress.

Bastille Day in 1935 gives the ultimate illustration to the way things were going. Organized groups had been jockeying for position since May. It turned out to be a perfect summer day. While an estimated 600 planes flew overhead, the police for once stayed systematically out of sight. Three successive *défilés* or processions ran their course passionately yet peacefully. In the morning, the traditional military parade took care of the Unknown Solider. In the afternoon, something approaching half a million communists and socialists, plus a scattering of radicals and every leftist intellectual group with any soul, trooped in a joyful mass from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de le Nation. In front of the statue of Baudin (shot during the brief uprising against Louis Napolean's *coup d'état* in 1851) they raised their fists and renewed his oath to stand fast on the barricades. Here in the streets, the Popular Front discovered the euphoric spirit that carried it to victory a year later. Red Soviet flags mingled with the *tricouleur;* apparently for the first time in such a mass meeting, both the Internationale and the Marseillaise could be sung without catcalls. Every surviving participant testifies to the semi-delirium of the occasion. Fascism *must* fall back before this return to revolutionary traditions.

That evening, with torches, between thirty and forty thousand

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representatives of the right-wing Croix de Feu marched down the Avenue de Champs-Elysées, in step and in uniform. It was the most impressive display of force Colonel de La Rocque's semifascist organization had ever staged, but from here on its numbers dwindled.

Amid this extreme polarization of opinion that obviously left many citizens gasping, several forms of expression took on a renewed life. Every newspaper and review ran its *enquête* or opinion survey on some variation of the question: can we avoid a revolution? Congresses and meetings and assemblies came so fast that the *Mutualité* could not handle them and the traffic overflowed to the Salle Bullier and the Cirque d'Hiver and the Vélodromes. Later, at the critical juncture of May, 1936 while the striking workers waited for their new government to take office, this energy found a new form of expression: the sit-in strike.

The only man apparently able to give some direction to these events was neither a fanatic nor a rabble rouser. Léon Blum began as a first-rate literary and theater critic and became a courageous and honest statesman. But even his integrity failed the test of the Spanish Civil War. It is either appropriate or ironic that at this crucial moment France put itself in the hands of a literary man. Inevitably he attended the Writers Congress and found himself face to face ("nose to nose" as the newspaper account reads) with Aragon, who had written a wildly antibourgeois poem four years earlier with the memorable line: "Shoot Léon Blum." At least one reporter was watching alertly and wrote, "But nobody flapped. The communist poet-politico cordially shook hands with the socialist politico-poet."

There is the decade in a nutshell. The pop front was a handshake in the wilderness. Today, it has been romanticized by indulgent memories and documentary films (*1936: Le Grand Tournant*) into the last utopia.

Everyone I have talked to among the organizers of the Congress produces the same explanation for all that effort: antifascism. Yet the invitation sent out to writers all over the world began in this bland style which *La Bête Noire* called "equivocal":

> In the face of the dangers which threaten culture in a number of countries, a group of writers are taking the initiative of bringing together a congress in order to examine and discuss means for defending that culture. They propose that the congress clarify the conditions of literary creation and the relations between the writer and his public.

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Nowhere in the invitation does fascism or any political term appear.

The vagueness of the invitation was clearly a tactic to appeal to as wide a group of writers as possible. But how did the whole thing start? The explanation seems relatively simple. In August 1934 the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers was held in Moscow. Though a few independent voices were raised (soon to be silenced), the huge meeting served primarily as the occasion on which to promulgate the official doctrine of socialist realism—later called Zhdanovism after the Central Committee member who made the principal speech at that congress. A number of foreign writers were invited to attend, including Aragon, Jean-Richard Bloch, Paul Nizan, and Malraux from France. They returned to Paris with varying degrees of enthusiasm for the new doctrine, yet all apparently eager to stage a similar mass meeting of writers in Paris. The Comintern, having just shifted a few months earlier to a new policy of alliances and popular fronts, gave support. A number of other writers were brought in to help plan the congress, including André Chamson and Louis Guilloux. Guilloux, who was one of the secretaries and handled a large part of the correspondence, stated that the man who supplied the funds was Mikhail Kolzoff, Comintern agent and commissar of the Soviet delegation. In France, of course, the Party had no official or legal control over writers. But it could now browbeat and shame them with the issue of antifascism, even though the Party itself had been trying to ignore Hitler and Mussolini for five years. In an era of peace conferences and huge international assemblages, the Congress could be turned into an instrument of policy.

Of the twenty-four signers of the invitation, four out of the first five in alphabetical order (Abraham, Alain, Aragon, Barbusse, Bloch) were known communist militants—though Barbusse was allowed a very long tether. Alain on the other hand was the very voice of the radical party, a widely respected writer and philosopher who had taken an active part in left-wing groups after the February riots. (His name disappeared from later lists; he refused to participate in the Congress.) Other names that would be immediately recognized were those of André Gide, André Malraux, and Romain Rolland. It would be hard for leftist writers to resist this call, even though its terms were very vague. But quite a few were in fact missing. Neither Thomas Mann nor Bernard Shaw nor H. G. Wells attended, though the first two were subsequently named to the twelve-man praesidium. Upton Sinclair, considered the model writer

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—activist because of his candidacy in California on the socialist ticket, did not respond. Among the French, Jules Romains and Montherlant stayed away in spite of blandishments. George Duhamel is reported to have said, "I cannot take part in a Congress along with Gide, and with men who might, one day, be responsible for the death of my three sons." One wonders if someone like Lukacs, at that date in Moscow, was even invited. In addition to the organizers listed above, here are a few names from the 230 delegates from 38 countries who did attend: E. M. Forster and Aldous Huxley from England; Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, and Lion Feuchtwanger from Germany—all in exile; Michael Gold and Waldo Frank fresh from the Congress in New York which had organized the League of American Writers and abolished the earlier John Reed Clubs; Pasternak, Babel, Ehrenburg, Alexis Tolstoy from the USSR. Though Valle-Inclan from Spain had been put on the program, he did not appear. French writers were legion. In addition to Gide, Malraux, and Aragon, the following made speeches of some magnitude or significance: Benda, Guéhenno, Cassou, Chamson, Nizan, Jean-Richard Bloch, Tzara, and Eluard (representing Breton and the surrealists).

The style of the Congress, judging by newspaper accounts and photographs, was that of a popular assembly prepared to honor its culture heroes, responding generously to the spoken word, and impatient with any profound content. The newspapers, naturally, loved the anecdotal and sartorial side. Both Huxley and Mike Gold wore funny hats. Everyone on the platform kept his jacket on in spite of the heat. But the *Dépêche de Toulouse* reported that "Monsieur Vaillant-Couturier walked up to give his speech in a beach costume with a huge scarf tied in a bow around his neck." Delegations of children were brought up in track suits and bare feet to present flowers to foreign writers. Books were sold in the foyer, with the authors to autograph them. People sketched the speakers. Photographers prowled. The talks went on and on. Enormous quantities of beer were drunk. The management of the Mutualité had to turn the lights off to drive away the knots of people arguing late into the night. The main headquarters for the celebrities and insiders was the Closerie des Lilas, floating on its fifty-year history of banquets and literary battles. Most reporters enjoyed themselves and shared the excitement. "A scene of high drama to which the modern world, hungry for enchantments, is now treating itself . . . And what a crowd! The young and the not so young, activists, partisans, outlandish

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types and girlfriends with their faces craftily painted in ochre and carmine, their fingernails tinted every color in the book."

Aragon's and Nizan's monthly *Commune*—which was in a position to be considered the horse's mouth—announced that all the speeches would be collected and published in a book. Many duller and less significant works burden our shelves, but somewhere an editor showed the wisdom not to feel bound by the announcement. The principal speeches can be found scattered through various reviews and the sequence reconstructed. After Benda's rash challenge to materialism almost everyone closed ranks and found continuity and harmony in all directions. Writing in New York about what he called the "Writers' International," Malcolm Cowley had this to say in *The New Republic* after digesting the reports: ". . . nobody spoke in favor of abandoning 'bourgeois culture' in favor of proletarian culture." He was generally right, but he can't have read everything.

Saturday night was the main event. It must have been worth standing in line to pay the three franc entry fee to hear what the heavy-weights would say about "the individual." Gide led off. He had made an address the previous October called "Literature and Revolution" in which he met socialist realism head on by calling for something more to his liking: "communist individualism." It must have been hard for him now to raise the ante. Nevertheless, he produced a long, carefully thought-out speech and was followed by Malraux, Ehrenburg, and Max Brod, Kafka's friend and executor, who spoke of the individual as a pure dream in a world defined by society and reason.

The next three days became very confused. The order of speakers had to be changed; squabbles arose about who should be allowed to "intervene" and for how long. On Sunday afternoon, humanism was the announced subject. Brecht got three minutes, whereas he was supposed to have had fifteen Friday night on "Cultural Heritage." Every topic began to sound the same. Sunday night was "Nation and Culture." Chamson gave a solid talk. Barbusse scuttled it with his leaden echoes. Mike Gold shook out his long hair and recited his working-class background. Except for a few tense exchanges, things sank into the doldrums until the closing session Tuesday night. Apparently, the audience never failed to fill the hall. The organizers were very efficient. On the final evening, came the most vivid moment of all. Pasternak had been brought to Paris on the last day, under duress and under guard. His name was not in the program. Kolzoff had insisted on his presence. His entrance into the

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Palais de la Mutualité produced a standing ovation. Here is the account carried in Barbusse's *Monde:* its bad faith makes one wince. "In spite of an illness from which he has been suffering for two months, the great Soviet lyric poet insisted on attending the Congress. He recited two poems, beautiful examples of the blossoming of the new socialist realism." No one else had the courage or the imagination to read anything but a prepared speech. Pasternak made his short preliminary remarks in French.

> I wish to speak here of poetry, and not of sickness. Poetry will always exist down in the grass; it will always be necessary to bend down to perceive it; it will always be too simple a thing to discuss in meetings. It will always remain the organic function of a happy creature, overflowing with the felicity of language, tensed in the birthright of his heart, forever aware of his mission. The more happy men there are, the easier it will be to find artists.

One of the poems he recited (with Malraux translating) was "So It Begins" about children growing up. It ends: "So poetry sets them on their way." Without that instant of light and life, the Congress might have shrivelled up and blown away.

If Pasternak gave literature back to the Congress in the form of poetry, it was the dissidents and the hot-heads that gave it life. Obviously the organizers wanted to show a united front, both to the intellectuals they were trying to galvanize into action, and to the forces of fascism that were marching all over Europe. Malcontents who doubted the purposes or the integrity of the Congress were not welcome, and in general they were maneuvered into the background. Since texts of the announced speeches had to be sent to the secretariat of the Congress in advance in order to allow for preparation of press releases, summaries, and in some cases translations, the organizing committee could usually anticipate undesirable speakers. For example, the Czech delegate and poet, Vitezlav Nezval, waited his turn for two days in the wings and suddenly discovered the Congress was over. He had planned to greet the gathering in the name of both the Left Front and the literary avant-garde of Czechoslovakia, and to go on to condemn both proletarian literature and socialist realism. He was also one of those responsible for inviting the two surrealists, Breton and Eluard, to Prague two months earlier for a series of literary-political mainifestations outside party sponsorship. This carries us into another story.

* * *

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The political vagaries of surrealism constitute one of the most fascinating case histories of intellectual gymnastics and conscience-searching in the Thirties. The chronicle has now been filled out in considerable detail, but usually in such a way as to detach the political needle-threadings from literary activity, or to treat the politics as an inopportune and marginal pastime that merely distracted from the esthetic concerns of the movement. Many people are involved, but only Breton remains squarely in the center of the picture. Rudely telescoped, the story runs like this. Launched ambitiously in 1924–1925 with a manifesto and a review called *La Revolution Surrealiste,* the surrealist movement began as an extraordinary amalgam of generalized poetics and semiscientific experiments in altered states of consciousness. The surrealists were also among the first French intellectuals to read Freud attentively. Almost immediately, however, a series of personal and historic circumstances carried the surrealists rapidly toward Marxism and the Communist Party. It mattered little that the Party was in a very dry season, holding out few rewards to artists and intellectuals. Early in 1927 the five principal surrealists joined the Party and accepted assignment to local cells. After the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev in November of the same year, they had some second thoughts but did not go away. From 1927 to 1933 the surrealists carried on a steady guerilla war with the Party while insisting on their right to participate in events and organizations designed to give some shape and direction to artists on the left. Supported in varying ways by Péret, Eluard, and Crevel, Breton acted in a headstrong fashion. He reaffirmed his faith in Freud. He refused to give automatic obedience to directives from Moscow. He defended Trotsky. He would not accept any policies that compromised artistic freedom and the right to experiment in new forms of expression. The surrealists and their numerous publications represented a challenge to the steady movement of intellectuals toward the Party after 1932. That year Aragon ended his long vacillation and abandoned the surrealists completely for Communism. In 1933 the surrealists intrepidly attacked Barbusse and Romain Rolland for organizing the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement against war, calling it a betrayal of class warfare. They censured Ehrenburg and the editorial pages of *L'Humanité.* For these accumulated reasons and others, Breton and Eluard were finally expelled from the communist controlled Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers. February 1934 sparked them back to life along with everyone else. Breton was one of the principal sponsors of the first major response to the riots among intellectuals. Dated Feburary 10, "Appel à la

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lutte" calls for unity of action against fascism and for a general strike. In an important lecture that June in Brussels, he reviewed the whole social evolution of surrealism and reaffirmed its materialist position by stating: "the liberation of the spirit requires as a prior condition the liberation of man himself." At this point, surrealism had reached the peak of its activity and its international influence. After the highly successful visit to Prague in April 1935, Breton and Eluard accepted an invitation to the Canary Islands and, in the spring of 1936, to London for a huge surrealist exhibit with lectures and related events.

When announcements went out for the 1935 writers' congress, the surrealists expressed doubt about the need to defend bourgeois culture and demanded that the agenda include a discussion of "the right to pursue, in literature and in art, new means of expression." They constituted too important a group to be excluded from the Congress. Yet not a single surrealist appeared in the printed program even though René Crevel was an active member of the organizing committee for the Congress. Everything was obviously up in the air when, a week before the Congress opened, André Breton recognized Ilya Ehrenburg in the street. An opponent of the Soviets in 1917, Ehrenburg had changed his mind and had spent most of the last twenty years in Paris writing for *L'Humanité* and representing Soviet artistic freedom. In 1934 he published a collection of essays on the French literary scene, praising Gide and Malraux, criticizing Mauriac and Morand, and saving his most concentrated vitriol for the surrealists.

> I don't know if they are really sick or if they are only faking their craziness . . . These young phosphorescents, wound up in theories of onanism and the philosophy of exhibitionism, play act at being the zealots of revolutionary intransigence and proletarian honesty . . . They have their pastimes. For example, they study pederasty and dreams.

He worked several pages out of it. Now, if there is one prejudice Breton imposed on the group around him, it was the exclusion of homosexuals. (Only Crevel was tolerated.) Fairly early in the game the surrealists had developed a somewhat violent strain and believed in what they called "correction." Breton, seeing their slanderer there in the street, simply raised his arm and slapped him—twice according to some accounts. If Breton knew that Ehrenburg was head of the

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Soviet delegation to the Congress, it did not deter him. Ehrenburg retaliated in the organizing committee: the surrealists must be excluded. The behind-the-scene maneuvers were long and painful, lasting until after the Congress had opened. Crevel was both absolutely loyal to Breton and a dedicated party worker. Jean Cassou told how Crevel persuaded him to go to the Closerie des Lilas one night after the evening session in order to convince Ehrenburg that Breton must be allowed to speak. Because the organizing committee wanted to maintain unity at all costs, Ehrenburg had a simple and totally effective answer. If Breton spoke, the Soviet Delegation would walk out. Meanwhile a kind of compromise had been reached: Eluard would read Breton's speech at the Monday evening session. This kind of personal-ideological dilemma takes its toll, particularly on the less thick-skinned. Crevel was beseiged by a number of personal problems, and he had just learned that he had only a short time to live because of a pulmonary condition. Later during the night of Cassou's useless appeal to Ehrenburg, Crevel committed suicide. His medical papers were found in his pocket. He had a speech all written out for delivery. There was a short tribute at the next day's meeting.

Eluard was finally given the platform after midnight following a long talk on dreams by Tzara that had sent most of the audience home. Breton had written an effective and scandalous speech which trampled resolutely across all the guidelines set up by the context and the program of the Congress. He denounced the Franco-Soviet pact and any cultural rapprochement, the new patriotic face of *L'Humanité,* the popular front ideology, and the growing tendency to condemn all German thought. Eluard apparently read the text well, but another incident was already developing which contributed to the neglect of the strong surrealist attack on the Congress as a sellout to the existing order.

Starting earlier during Tzara's talk, voices had been raised in the auditorium clamoring for a discussion of Victor Serge. For those who knew the tale, this was a more explosive situation than the surrealist dispute. Journalists were watching alertly. The protests came from a group of noncommunist Marxists and Trotskyites, two of whom had been scheduled to speak only as the result of desperate personal appeals to Malraux and Gide. It was very late. The burly *service d'ordre* of ushers provided by the communists left their positions and converged on the troublemakers while Eluard was reading Breton's speech. The Serge advocates had no objection to that text, but

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they wanted their turn. The most obstreperous of them, Henri Poulaille, finally walked out, taking the bouncers with him and ripping his photograph out of the display case on his way through the foyer. Most of the newspapers picked up these rumblings; not many of them were represented the next afternoon in a smaller hall when Madeleine Paz was finally given the floor. Gide, Malraux, and Barbusse sat on the platform with knitted brows (as a photograph shows) while she stood to speak. Citing the printed program, she affirmed the need to discuss a specific case involving freedom of expression, direct and indirect censorship, and the dignity of the writer. Serge, a French-language writer of Russian parents, Belgian birth, and revolutionary convictions, had gone to Russia in 1919 where he was admitted to the party and given important responsibilities in organizing and administering the Third International. His novels and historical works describing the early years of the revolution in Russia were known to French-speaking intellectuals. In 1927 he was excluded from the party and imprisoned without trial for several weeks on suspicions of Trotskyite sympathies. Arrested again in 1933 he was deported without trial to Orenburg in the Urals, where he was confined with no resources, material or intellectual, for three years. He could write but not send his manuscripts abroad. He and his wife were both in precarious health.

Madeleine Paz's speech ran close to an hour, with an impassioned coda.

> Right now, he's paying the price. While we sit here at a Congress convoked to defend the integrity of thought, out there, on the other side of the Urals, a thinking man is trying to remain calm and hold onto his hope in the revolution.

Three Russians, including Ehrenburg, answered her charges by saying Citizen Kibalchich (his family name) had bitten the hand that fed him; they knew nothing about the French writer, Victor Serge. The Belgian delegate angrily retorted that they lied, that in fact Serge had translated many Russian texts of the revolution, including the poetry of one of the Soviet delegates who had just spoken and who would otherwise be unknown in France. Unfortunately no one made a motion or proposed any specific action. These particular speeches are the hardest of all to find. Anna Seghers provided an escape route by complaining that if the Congress was going to talk about individual cases, why didn't they bring up all the imprisoned

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German writers? Gide had been immensely nervous throughout the discussion, scribbling draft after draft of a closing statement. What he finally said expressed concern for the security of the Soviet Union and confidence in its actions.

* * *

It is no easy matter to catch the spirit and the specifics of a Congress that lasted five days and must have generated upwards of a third of a million words, now dispersed. In order to sample those speeches, I shall reduce them to six and quote a key passage from each with a minimum of comment. Each of these six men had wide experience in polemical writing and intellectual maneuvering. In effect, they form three loose pairs of writers; each pair displays an obvious link and an equally significant contrast. It is the contrasts that I hope will make themselves clear. The first pair is the Soviet delegate, Panerov, and Aragon, both important and active party members committed to the doctrine of socialist realism officially adopted a year earlier. Panerov spoke at the opening session and concluded his talk thus.

> Clearly, each one of our artists follows his own path, retains his own style and individuality. But all of us move toward the position of socialist realism, toward creating a literature such as has never existed in the history of humanity . . .
>
> What then is socialist realism?
>
> Socialist realism, according to the statutes of our writers (union) is the essential method of Soviet literary art and literary criticism. It requires of the artist that he provide an image that conforms to truth, a concrete historic image of reality in its revolutionary development. This truth and this precision in representing reality must ally themselves with the problem of the ideological reshaping and the education of workers in the spirit of socialism.

Aragon talked on the same subject at the very last session. He was also answering Breton's speech, which had been read the previous day. His tone was fiery, almost gaudy.

> Socialist realism or revolutionary romanticism? Which shall we choose? Realism is the only way to approach the world before us. We must choose the light, and reject the dark. It is a matter of

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> finding our way back, precisely, to the side of the light, and to neglect the shadows. . . .

[Here he quoted Lautréamont's *Poésies,* stating that the passage applies perfectly to the surrealists:]

> There are debased writers, dangerous jokers, two-bit fools, solemn mystifiers, veritable lunatics, who deserve to be in an asylum. Their cretin heads, which must have a hole in them somewhere, dream up gigantic monsters which come down to earth instead of drifting away." Who has shouted loudest for freedom of expression? Marinetti—and look where it has led him: to Fascism. We have nothing to hide, and that is why we welcome as a joyful expression the new slogan of Soviet literature: Soviet realism. Culture is no longer something for just a handful of people.

Aragon was a very valuable property. As time went on, he seemed to be able to get away with anything.

The next pair of speakers had no use for socialist realism and the party line. Breton loved to rumble his rhetoric. He was also hopping mad as he wrote. One hopes Eluard read the text as if it were a sermon. "Beware of the perils of too great faith!" Breton said of Comintern directives backing the Franco-Soviet pact. After an attack on those who took Rimbaud's name in vain as a political rather than a poetic revolutionary, he concludes:

> We maintain that the activity of interpreting the world must go on and remain linked to the activity of transforming the world. . . . The movement of authentic contemporary poets toward a poetry of propaganda . . . signifies a negation of the very factors which historically determine the nature of poetry. To defend culture means above all to take in hand the cause of whatever stands up under serious materialist analysis, of what is viable and will continue to bear fruit. Stereotype declarations against fascism and war will not ever succeed in liberating the spirit from its shackles, old and new. . . . "Transform the world," said Marx; "Change life," said Rimbaud. Those two watchwords are one and the same to us.

Allusions to Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* formed one of the refrains of the Congress; Breton made it clear that there should be no compromise with bourgeois values and that popular front politics meant just that.

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I pair Breton's intransigence with one of the most straightforward speeches in the whole five days. Gaetano Salvemini was an Italian historian and socialist deputy whom Mussolini had exiled and stripped of his citizenship. What Salvemini said sounds very elementary. But remember, the atmosphere of the Congress was such that almost every speaker began with the symbolic greeting, "Comrades." Salvemini had been fighting fascism with word and deed probably longer than anyone else attending the Congress.

> If you give the name *fascism* to all bourgeois societies; if you close your eyes to the fact that fascism means bourgeois society with something added, that is, a bourgeois society which has suppressed the very possibility of cultural freedom; if you apply the same treatment to two different forms of society—then you run the risk of allowing in nonfascist societies the destruction of fragments of intellectual liberty that are not sufficient but that nevertheless have great value. We do not greatly appreciate light and air as long as we have them. To understand their value, we have to lose them. But the day we lose our freedoms, we shall not easily win them back.
>
> Confronted by fascist-type bourgeois societies, we Italians and Germans have had to take a position of radical negation. In nonfascist bourgeois societies, radical nihilism is a dangerous thing. Do not scorn your freedoms; rather defend them stubbornly, while declaring them inadequate and struggling to develop them.
>
> The freedom to create is constrained in nonfascist bourgeois societies. In fascist-type bourgeois societies it is totally suppressed. It is partially suppressed in Soviet Russia. Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* cannot be read in Russia. It is in Russia that Victor Serge is held prisioner. . . .

The sudden sucking-in of breath at those naked words must have been audible for some distance. Antifascism could take many forms, but the Congress did its best to disguise that fact. Salvemini was later appointed Lecturer in History at Harvard—over President Lowell's objections.

The last pair is Gide and Malraux. Both spoke Saturday night, on the individual. Picking up a sentence out of the preface of Malraux's novel, *Days of Wrath,* Gide developed a history of French literature in which it is Diderot and Rousseau who, after the privileged forms of classicism, brought back the turbulence and the popular feeling missing since Rabelais. Admirable as it has been, the

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culture handed on by bourgeois society remains artificial, something under glass.

> Today in the capitalist society we still inhabit, it seems to me that the only worthwhile literature is a literature of opposition.
>
> For the bourgeois writer, to have a true communion with his class is an impossibility. To have a communion with the people . . . Well, I'll have to say that it is equally impossible as long as the people remain what they are today, as long as they are not what they can and must become, what they will become if we do our part.
>
> . . . Only the enemies of Communism can see it as a desire for uniformity. What we expect of it, and what the Soviet Union is beginning to show us after a difficult period of struggles and temporary constraints in expectation of greater freedom, is a condition of society which would permit the fullest development of each man, the bringing forth and application of all his potentialities. In our sad Western world, as I have said, we still fall short of the mark. For a time social questions threaten to encroach on all others—not that they strike us as more interesting than the others—but because the condition of the culture depends closely on the state of the society. It is a devotion to culture that leads us to say: as long as our society remains what it is, our first concern will be to change it.

Gide must have been in good form. He would soon regret and virtually eat his words. Deep in politics and polemic he wrote very little during 1935 in his *Journal.* There is only one page on the Congress, which must have devoured three full weeks of his life. He tells how he greeted one dark and richly robed lady by saying he was happy to see Greece represented. "Moi," she replied with annoyance, "c'est l'Inde."

Malraux delivered the only formal speech that did not follow a written text. Afterwards the press bureau reproduced a single page of notes from which he had talked for close to an hour. He numbered eleven points, one a quotation from the Preface to *Days of Wrath,* each a potential speech by itself. Number eight:

> Fascist and communist communions. Reply to Gide. There is a communion possible as of now with the people; not in its nature (there can never be a communion in nature) but in its finality, in this case meaning in its will to revolution. Every real communion implies a finality.

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The most striking passage comes in point three. Before him sat a vast assemblage of writers whose literary existence depended on their establishing a name and attracting readers, and who had erected for themselves the elaborate stage of an international congress. Of all of them, Malraux was the writer who most appeared to move through history as if his life were a dramatic extension of his literary work—or vice versa. Here is what he said, according to his notes.

> Individualism arises out of the fact that man finds pleasure in looking upon himself as someone else (*un autre*), in living biographically. The humanism we desire to create, and which displays its earlier stages in the line of thought that connects Voltaire to Marx, requires above all a true awareness of man, a new stock-taking.
>
> *To be a man means, for each of us, to reduce to a minimum the actor within him. [Etre un homme, c'est réduire au minimum, pour chacun, sa part de comédie.]*

The only proper response to that statement by one of the principal organizers would have been the immediate disbanding of the Congress. As with Pasternak, one wonders what note of irony—or bad faith—tinged the last sentence.

* * *

It is high time (as Aragon snorted, quoting Boileau in support of socialist realism) "to call a cat a cat." This was one of the most thoroughly rigged and steamrollered assemblages ever perpetrated on the face of Western literature in the name of culture and freedom. That estimate does not diminish but rather amplifies its significance as an historical and intellectual event. Only a few rightist critics and fascist rags talked of funds from Moscow and red writers. There sat some of Europe's most distinguished men of letters presiding over a meeting that systematically swept into a corner any dissent from the prevailing opinion that the true revolutionary spirit belonged to the Soviet Government. Did they know better? Could they have known better? Must we call into question the good faith of all organizers and participants? These are sore questions. Only Alain got off the bandwagon. In exchanges I had with them thirty-five years after the fact, both Aragon and Malraux reaffirmed the genuinely antifascist

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nature of the Congress, accepted their role in it without regret, and rejected any more ominous interpretation of these events, described by Malraux as an "impassioned confusion." Yet one wonders if Salvemini, the writer present who had suffered most for his opposition to fascism, would have been allowed to deliver his text had he not been a friend of Gide's. The machinery devoured Nezval, Breton, and Brecht, and kept the Serge affair almost out of sight. The two communist publications (*Commune; Le Monde*) purporting to give a full account of the proceedings and to reproduce the important speeches gave only a few slanted lines to Benda, Breton, Salvemini, and Paz. The texts of the last three were too honest and too defiant of the reigning Stalinist ideology to appear anywhere except in a small left-opposition monthly called *Les Humbles.* Several sponsors in retrospect attributed the success of the Congress to the genius of Willi Münzenberg, a wealthy and powerful member of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party. He lived in France and was skilled in popular front tactics. He probably played a role behind the scenes, but the strains and stresses go far deeper. In Gombrowicz's crazily apt theater piece, *Operetta,* the militant revolutionary is carried into battle and on to total power on the shoulders of a willing—and obsessively vomiting—professor.

Outwardly the consequences of the Congress were pedestrian. A final declaration was adopted, an international association formed, and an executive committee with national committees appointed—all by the organizing committee, without vote or discussion. Written or at least carefully edited by Gide himself, the declaration made no waves. It asked for more translations, more travel opportunities for writers, and an international literary prize. It declared that the executive committee was prepared "to fight on its own ground, namely for culture, against war, fascism, and generally against every menace to civilization." A few days after the close of the Congress, Gide wrote the Soviet Ambassador about Victor Serge and followed through with a formal visit to the Embassy. Serge was finally released in 1936, thanks not to the discussions at the Congress or to Gide's appeal, but (Serge writes in his memoirs) to Romain Rolland's personal intervention with Stalin. A second Congress was held in Spain in the summer of 1936. Given the situation, not much could come of it. At least it provided the occasion for Malraux to meet Hemingway; they divided up the Spanish war for their private novel-writing contest.

The real effects of the Congress lie elsewhere. It was perfectly

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timed and designed to consolidate the formation of the intellectual popular front, without which the political popular front would have had a less euphoric reception in the socialist and radical press. The Congress called in New York one month before the French Congress had served the same purpose, apparently responding to the same directives: to politicize the independent, bourgeois *homme des lettres* in terms of antifascism and "defense of culture." Gide's case is almost classic. Benda had written ten years earlier in *The Treason of the Intellectuals:* "Essentially ours will have been the century of the intellectual organization of political hatreds." By 1935 politics was no longer a pistol shot disrupting the literary concert; it seemed to have become the concert itself.

This development could not be traced to any spread of the idea, dear to Herzen, that the intelligentsia was part of the proletariat because exploited, like the working class, by traditional powers. The political drive to rediscover the people had somehow fused with the need to introduce an esthetic attitude into daily life—a tendency clearly discernible in Freud, dada, surrealism, the Bauhaus, and the personal journal form of writing to which Gide was dedicated. It was in 1935 that the neglected American writer, Joseph Freeman, explained and defended proletarian literature with this bald statement, which neatly answers Benda: "the dichotomy between poetry and politics had vanished, and art and life were fused." It began to sound uncannily like Huysmans or Wilde stood on his head. But now there was a social cause to absorb the deep esthetic drive toward adventure discernible in the anarchist dalliance of many artists before 1914.

* * *

What then was this 1935 Writers' Congress that we should pick it over for so long? Wasn't it purely and simply a flop? It could be painted very easily as a monstrous machine for grinding out worthless copy. It had no effect on history or policy, and the principal side effects worked to the benefit of a militant party subservient to a terroristic foreign state. Couldn't we forget the whole thing? Shouldn't we stick to our habits of examining individual careers and major works of art? I think not.

In the past, writers have organized themselves into different kinds of groups, from official academies to disgruntled café cliques. But, unless one goes back to the great ecclesiastical councils, there have been no major attempts like the Paris Congress to mobilize all

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categories of writers around a political issue, however blurred, and in one convocation, however steamrollered. Even the Soviet writers' congresses which provided the precedent tended to avoid basic political discussion and to deal with the writer as the servant of the state. In their own terms, the Soviet congresses were fairly successful. Since it really had no terms, the Paris congress neither succeeded nor failed. In a mammoth public ritual it consecrated the formation of an intellectual popular front. But that apparent fusion of forces and the euphoria it produced were based on a set of misunderstandings and ambiguities. "Revolution" remained as fuzzy as the "culture" they had met to defend. Since no question ever came to a vote, no terms or issues had to be clarified. The Congress probably tells us as much about the easily hoodwinked idealism, the opportunism, and the vanity of writers as about the political stresses of the era. For those who wanted to know, it was possible to find out about the terror that reigned in Soviet Russia as well as in Hitler's Germany. But most people, including writers, turned their backs on at least part of the truth and accepted the dwindling options. Do you choose bourgeois-capitalist fascism? Or Soviet Communism? Among the militant writers one rarely heard talk as fundamental and as illuminating as Salvemini's remarks on two kinds of bourgeoisie, or as Breton's refusal of any kind of political control of literature, even in the name of the revolution.

The total event gives a better reading of the intellectual temperature in 1935 than, say, the Manifesto of the Intellectuals in 1898 that helped reopen the Dreyfus case. Yet ultimately the Congress makes one wonder if Valéry, who shunned politics, wasn't right after all. Gide reports something he said back in 1932: "Impossible to put together a united front to oppose the ruinous claims of the nationalists. He convinces me." But Gide was not finally convinced until five years later.

Right or wrong, many writers probably continue to believe that if they only band together, their corporate voice will be heard.

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Author's Note: I wish to acknowledge information provided by Pierre Abraham, Louis Aragon, Jean Cassou, Louis Guilloux, and André Malraux in conversation and by letter. Another valuable source of documents is an extensive file of newspaper clippings and press releases concerning the Congress collected by Rose Adler and preserved in the Fonds Doucet in Paris. Most unidentified quotations in my text come from that file. I am grateful to Francois Chapon, the director of the Fonds Doucet, for having brought the file to my attention at a moment when my investigations had reached an impasse.

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**Aharon Megged**

# STORIES WITHOUT HEROES: THE SINGULARITY OF THE HEBREW STORY

The Hebrew story is the story in Hebrew. It is not in the least important that there are myths parallel to and more ancient than the biblical stories of man's creation and the flood. What determines their distinctive literary qualities is the fact that they were written in Hebrew words and Hebrew syntax. Meaning is latent in the words, in the structure of the sentences, and in their rhythm, and in this lies the singularity which distinguishes the Hebrew story from all others. Yeats, in an introduction to his plays, wrote, "When I changed my syntax, I also changed my intellect." The syntax of the Hebrew story is, likewise, Hebrew "intellect," Hebrew ways of thought and of perceiving the world.

The epic of the Hebrew people begins by saying, "And God said to Abraham, 'Go forth from the land of your birth, your country, and your home; I will lead you to the land which I will show thee.'" Then, after two sentences, "And Abraham went forth as God bade him." After only two more sentences, Abraham already is in Canaan, in Shechem, and from there travels south to Egypt as a result of famine.

The rhythm of the story takes broad strides, renounces details, and occasionally lingers on a description of exceptionally important events, those with motivational significance for the future, the fate of the people and its faith, or the character of Abraham. After two chapters, we already find ourselves at the "Covenant Between the Pieces."

The Greek epic, *The Iliad,* begins with the words,

> Sing, goddess, the wrath of Paleus's son Achilles,
> a destroying wrath which brought upon the Acheans
> myriad woes, and sent forth to Hades
> many valiant souls of heroes.

Its Roman counterpart, *The Aeneid,* begins,

> Arms and the man I sing, who, forced by fate
> And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,
> expelled and exiled, left the Trojan shores
> Long labors both by sea and land and bore . . .

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The distinction between the latter two epics and the first one lies in the syntax and rhythm of both the single sentence and the plot as a whole. They embody ways of thinking about and perceiving the world. The Hebrew epic could by no means begin in the way the two others do, since their rhythm is foreign to the Hebrew spirit.

Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* enlarges on the qualities distinguishing biblical from Homeric narrative, placing the story of Isaac's sacrifice opposite that of Ulysses's scar. The biblical tale is multifaceted, making only what is important to the plot stand out in the foreground, emphasizing only climaxes, and doing away with minor details. The background is steeped in a vague dusk of either unexplicit or unelicited thought and feeling. These are derived from what is unsaid. The wonder remains, as do the obscure allusions. The reader himself must fill the void with guesswork, scrutiny, and interpretation. Homeric narrative, on the other hand, knows only foreground, a brightly lit present throwing equal light over all details without perspective. Events, sights, thoughts, and feelings are fully and explicitly offered. Homer hides nothing, conceals no allusions. His narration contains no depth of time, fate, or consciousness.

But the distinctive qualities of the ancient Hebrew tale set it apart not only from Homeric epic but also from the other narrative prose and poetry of the ancient world. The rhythm of Egyptian and Sumerian narrative differs greatly from that of Homer; these are infused with magic and "spaces" of mystery. However, in spite of the fact that research has noted their influence on the biblical tale, there is no analogy in structure and literary quality. Rather, the influence applies to subject matter, to motif, or to the imaginative exploitation of a mythological theme. S. N. Kramer writes in *History Begins in Sumer*:

> [The Sumerian narrative] is almost entirely lacking in a sense of tight plot structure. The tales tend to be spinned [sic] out disconnectedly and monotonously, with very minor distinctions in emphasis and tone. . . . They lack a sense of climax and seemingly place no value on the effect which heightens the story's strength. . . . There is no attempt at characterisation and psychological portraiture: the gods and heroes in Sumerian narrative tend to be general types and not flesh and blood creatures with personal identities.

Thus there is not to be found a more perfect "short story" in ancient literature than that of Cain and Abel in Genesis. Fifteen verses

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unfold a great drama and embrace a complete world of passions and feelings—the relationship between two brothers who are contrasting, polar types and their relationship with their father who is at once a judge and the recipient of providence. Its plot is closed: there is a beginning, a middle with a climactic point, and an end. However, the circle remains interminably open: the inimitably maximal condensation, tight to the point of not allowing one extraneous detail, is a vessel for ramifying deeper layers steeped in dusk.

The obscure, the alluded, and the unsaid is greater than the revealed but also leaves the door open to empathy, supposition, and wonder. The relationship between the characters, two of them human and the third in the background, are ambivalent throughout every turning of the plot, and the story refuses to judge them unequivocally. Contrasts are juxtaposed throughout—jealousy and faithfulness, sin and repentance, punishment and pardon, anger and compassion. Consequently, the narration arouses both imagination and emotion, and a sentence like, "And Cain spoke to his brother Abel while they were in the field and arose up against his brother and slew him," which omits what Cain actually said to Abel at a dramatic climax, as if skipping over a heartbeat, leaves the reader momentarily stunned and excited by feelings and questions. The story enables many planes of possible interpretation—psychological, anthropological, theological, social, and ethical. Like S. N. Kramer, who claims that "history begins in Sumer," we can say that modern literature begins with the Hebrew story of Cain and Abel.

Much has been written about these qualities of biblical narrative. But I would like to emphasize still another striking phenomenon, which accounts for them and for the complexity and psychological depth of the Hebrew story: *the complete absence of heroes or heroic characters* who populated most narrative, myth, and epic in the literature of all peoples from ancient times to the late Middle Ages.

Throughout the entire body of biblical narrative (and later in talmudic fable and the Cabbal), there is not even one story in which the protagonist is endowed with attributes of perfection of mind and body like Gilgamesh and the Pharaohs, Achilles and Aeneas, and the heroes of the sagas and the chivalric romances.

In an Egyptian narrative from the second millennium B.C. about the adventure of Sanhat—a high official in Amanmachat I's court who escaped from his country at the death of his king—the new king, son of Sachtap, whose ascension to the throne is announced to Sanhat by an envoy, is described as "Lord of Wisdom," "Wonder-working Counsellor," "Great Benefactor," "Hero of the Almighty Arm," "In-

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comparably Dauntless One," "Bright-faced Smasher of Skulls," "Great-hearted Attacker," "He Whose Heart Does not Slumber," "Battle-Worthy at the Sight of Doom," "Most Gracious Lord of the Primed Nerves," "Cordial Conqueror," "Broadener of Boundaries," "Guardian of the Depths," and "God's One and Only."

The Babylonian epic, *The Story of Gilgamesh,* whose origin, yet more ancient, is actually Sumerian, describes its hero as ". . . part god and part man with a peerless body, who has hazarded all, visited all the ends of the earth, revealed all her secrets, peered behind the universal envelope of wisdom, beheld the hidden with his own eyes, laid bare the concealed, and told of what came before the Deluge." And although Gilgamesh is in the last analysis a tragic figure, since his ambition to win immortality is condemned to failure, during his life he possesses a perfect mind and body, having been graced by the gods with beauty, strength, courage, charm, seductive powers, wisdom, and knowledge of the mysteries of creation.

The Acheans of *The Iliad* are a folk of heroes, but the epic's chief hero, Achilles, possesses all the possible virtues: he is the mightiest and the fastest of warriors and, at the same time, the most handsome. He has a divine sense of honor, is eloquent, generous to friends and cruel to foes, a wise counsellor, master over both himself and his subordinates, and loved by men, women, and gods. As it does through Homer's Achilles, "divine blood also streams through the veins" of Virgil's Aeneas, hero of a national epic whose announced theme is struggle, bravery, the spirit of surmounting hardship, and the noble virtues in man. By virtue of these, the hero's adventure-strewn road leads him from Troy to Latium, and he founds the preeminent city of Rome, the emblem of everything ideal in the future Roman Empire. Thus, at the end of the work, Emperor Augustus is the hero to be praised, exalted in gifts and excellence over all of his subjects.

Against this, it is most striking and extraordinary and decisive with respect to the artistic qualities of narrative (in still another respect, as forming the spirit of a people or, inversely, as resulting from it) that there is not one ideally perfect hero in all the stories of the Bible. It is possible to go still further and say that except on rare occasions (principally in the Psalms), not even the Hebrew God is endowed with the heroic epithets of the human heroes of other epics.

The Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are in no respect perfect heroes (and their wives, in contrast to women in the other epics, are not distinguished for their beauty; description of them in the Bible is limited, sparse, and sometimes restricted to no more than a laconic epithet such as "comely to behold" or "lovely-eyed").

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Moses, the redeemer of Israel, leader, legislator, and lord of prophets, is no hero. David, appointed by the Lord, founder of the monarchy, melodious singer of Israel, is no hero. Even "Samson the Hero," a figure that seems borrowed from paganistic myth, a "wild" and "untamed" character, is no great hero. Moreover, historical biblical narrative contains not even a single wholly saintly figure, like that of Jesus in the New Testament, for example, or the later Christian saints. It is only Old Testament interpretation some hundreds of years later that crowns its figures with divine righteousness and might, and it is only in biblical chronicle, poem, or parable (Job was a parable) and not in narrative, that unambiguously and wholly positive or negative heroes exist.

All of the aforementioned characters and a host of subordinate ones (it is sufficient to mention the stories of Joseph, Samuel, Jonathan, Absalom, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, and Ruth) are never larger than life. They live and breathe within natural proportions, and like all flesh and blood, they possess inner contradictions, weaknesses, defects, emotional conflicts, struggles, sins, pangs of conscience, and ambivalent feelings both toward loved and hated, and they struggle with God and Fate. In fact, these are the model progenitors of the tragic heroes and antiheroes of modern literature to a much greater extent than the figures of Greek drama, who are defeated by supreme or mysterious or external forces beyond their control.

And this is what makes ancient Hebrew narrative a theater of the soul rather than a theater of fate. For example, Abraham's rising in the morning, taking a piece of bread and a skin of water, and giving them to Hagar before casting her with her son into the desert, although "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight"; the scene in which Joseph stands before his brothers and treats them as if they were strangers though he recognizes them, cruelly accusing them of spying and ordering Benjamin to be brought before him; the scene in which Moses, holding the Tables of the Covenant on Mount Sinai when God commands him to descend because the people has "speedly swerved from the path," implores "Why has God turned His wrath against His people?" before breaking the Tables; Saul's mingled joy and sorrow at the return of David, a youthful competitor whom he both loves and hates, after slaying Goliath, and whom he commands to sit and play before him, then strikes and misses; David's weeping above the palace gates, "Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son, who will prefer my death, mine instead of thine, Absalom, my son, my son," followed by an official announcement of the death of a son who had revolted against him, hounded him, and sought to murder him,

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are all moments of great internal struggle. Such moments are treated implicitly rather than explicitly. They take place in characters who are neither "wholly saintly" nor "wholly evil." Their greatness lies in their very imperfection and is located in their conflicts. And in all this there exists the possibility of choice: there is no determinism, no fatalism. The interference of Providence is only *one* of the acting forces.

These qualities of the ancient Hebrew stories also account for the individuality of their characters. One may say, paraphrasing Tolstoy, that all perfect characters resemble each other, whereas each deficient type differs from his fellow. In contrast to the heroes and gods of *The Iliad,* many of whom differ only in name; in contrast to the ancient epics, chivalric romance, and Christian religious narrative which created one-dimensional, denuded stereotypes; and in contrast to the traditional figures of the mysteries and the morality plays, there is not one biblical character who is a replica of another. Each possesses traits and curriculum vitae which are carved in the world's memory by his particular name and personality. Thus, the Talmud says (in Sanhedrin), "The Blessed Be He minted every man after the mold of the first man but no-one is alike." (Prometheus, Orpheus, Dedalus, etc. are, of course, heroes with weaknesses, but not one of them has natural human dimensions; they embody the personification and codification of the human unconscious and are not multi-faceted individuals.)

The kind of literary treatment in the Bible, fundamentally anthropocentric, found no continuity in world literature until a very late period. The Anglo-Scandinavian Beowulf, the French Bayard, Gawain, Tristan, and Roland, the Spanish Cid, and the German Sigfried—heroes of innumerable sagas and romances, who made their conquests in love and war on European soil—were not descendants of Abraham, Moses, Saul, or David, but of Gilgamesh and the Homeric hero (though their blood was mingled with that of the saintly and suffering Jesus). They were bold, fearless, and unblemished warriors who overcame all obstacles, and defeated dragons and infidels, while remaining noble hearts who offered their protection to damsels in distress and the innocent and righteous. The mysteries and the morality plays which adopted the Old and New Testament heroes in effect castrated them of all their human instincts, desires, and lusts, pacified all the conflicts in their characters, and made them into allegorical figures devoid of all human interest. When they Christianized them, they also gave them the *coup de grace* and plucked out their souls. Many of these heroes fell at the end of their path, but

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they were vanquished either by a greater hero-man (a legendary creature) or by one of the elements. Their common denominator was their subjection to a fixed system of ethical and social laws from which the author did not deviate.

Then came Cervantes and put in the mouth of his hero, Don Quixote, the antithesis of chivalric narrative and "heroic" heroes, the words, "A man by the name of Cid doubtlessly existed but it is very doubtful whether he actually performed all the feats ascribed to him." He was followed by Shakespeare, who restored the human dimensions of historical, mythological, and classical figures, and by the process of lowering them, bestowed on them a new, other greatness which brought out the enormous force latent in their internal contradictions. The trunk of the felled family tree of biblical heroes put out new shoots—"a twig shall grow forth from his roots"—and these grew and branched out. The transmigrated spirit of Abraham, Joseph, Samson, Saul, and Jonah can be found in all modern literature.

The Hebrew story itself became impoverished after the Bible was written. Talmudic, Cabbalistic, and Hassidic narrative strayed into exaggeration, irony, parable, and miracle, and lost the compression and conciseness of the first story-tellers. Nevertheless, even here there are no heroic or ideal types. The "Zadik," a spiritual hero, is nevertheless a creature of flesh and blood "like all men" who has succeeded in subjugating his instincts and overcoming obstacles by the power of faith. This is no titanic figure. Through all metamorphoses of Hebrew narrative, there is a certain absence common to all.

What is the source of this exclusively distinctive trait that has no parallel in the literature of the Western World? (Far Eastern narrative has a completely different nature.) Is it the belief that ethics are to be realized on earth, in this world and in no other, and that man through choice is responsible for his actions and fate? Is it the Hebrew-Jewish scepticism that tends to question truths and does not accept anything as a given axiom? The American poet Archibald MacLeish said that the Bible is not a book of belief but *constant search for* belief, of *struggle for* belief. The Chosen People, he says, incessantly and along its entire way, sins, flees from God, abandons Him, forgets Him, murmurs against Him, and returns to Him—and the cycle repeats itself.

Perhaps this constant struggle, unforeseen at the outset, rooted in an awareness of the contrasting natures of man and the world is also the secret of the singularity of Hebrew narrative, which has never had a perfect hero.

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## Ronald Hayman

# BRECHT'S DUPLICITY

It is easy to denigrate the man who said, "Let them grow, the little Brechts." I know of no one who was more ruthless in his attitude to the pregnancies he started, or more casual about starting them. When Paula Banholzer missed a period, he wrote to his friend Caspar Neher, "Of course I wasn't careful, not a bit, it would have ruined the fun. . . . After all, I'm not playing Tarot. I *can't* hold any trump cards back."

When he was twenty-two, he fantasized about being rich and elegant in "wide grey trousers, hitched up well on the waist; soft hat squashed down." There was so much to enjoy: "sunny flat, theatre, good food, music, higher feelings, indolence, people's respect, freedom from friction, travel, beauty, youth, health, art, freedom." Should he take the risk of "throwing all that into the garbage in obedience to a physiological need that vanishes as soon as satisfied"? No, he must not marry, "I must have elbow room, be able to spit wherever I please, sleep alone, be unscrupulous."

His first illegitimate child had been born in July 1919, when he was twenty-one; in March 1921 he was elated at the thought that "the unborn are setting their sights on me." "I'm getting a child by the dark-haired Marianne Zoff, the brown-skinned girl who sings in opera. I kneel down on the ground, weep, beat my breast, cross myself repeatedly." He told her that abortion was as bad as killing a child. "She's getting used, *lento,* to the idea of having the child on her own. That's where I want her." He was now thinking seriously about marrying Paula, but he had to face an unexpected challenge when the two women joined forces to confront him. They made him sit down between them, saying he must make a choice. Which of them did he want? "Both," he said, at which they both walked away. But when he found, afterwards, that Paula was on the same train from Munich to Augsburg, he beckoned her out into the corridor. Would she agree to a contractual arrangement by which he would marry Marianne Zoff to make the baby legitimate and would divorce her afterwards to marry Paula, legitimating their son, Frank? She let herself be talked into accepting a written agreement which could have no legal force. He was furious when Marianne miscarried, and he evolved a complicated scheme—"No getting away from politics!!!" he wrote—to "give" her Frank.

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The habit of manipulating people had begun in childhood. "His nature," wrote a classmate, "was always to boss others about, to impose his will on them." But except with his brother, who was two years younger, he could not get his own way by force. He was often beaten up by boys of his own age, and he did not fight bravely. Under pressure, he would run indoors, calling for his mother, who had formed the impression that he had a special quality and deserved preferential treatment. He soon succeeded in ousting his brother from the attic room they shared. Their mother's health was poor, which gave her an extra affinity for her older son, a frail, nervous, difficult child, who took little pleasure in eating. Before he was nine, cardiac trouble had asserted itself, confirming her notion that he needed special treatment.

He was dreamy, thoughtful, and temperamentally disinclined from the beginning to invest effort in activities such as washing, which brought no gratification. He could quickly learn a new technique—playing an instrument or playing a game—but he was immune to the bourgeois mania for self-improvement, and he discovered that grownups had only limited means at their disposal for imposing their will on him. Soon after starting at the Royal Bavarian Gymnasium when he was ten, he began to pit his wits against those of his teachers. A form master who enjoyed defeating the class with his questions was defeated by the silence which greeted him when a school inspector was sitting in on the lesson. A higher mark was extricated from the French master after the young Brecht had drawn red lines under sentences that had no mistakes in them and then complained that he couldn't see what was wrong. Nothing he learned at school seemed more instructional than the power games he played with those in authority.

For most tyro writers, the excitement of writing is the excitement of telling the truth; from the beginning, the main pleasure for Brecht seems to have been in the power that writing gained for him. He was just sixteen when he got himself commissioned to write for the local newspaper. His first job was to review a book of poems. Knowing that the editor of the paper had been corresponding with the poet, he wrote an insincerely enthusiastic review, comparing the rhythm with Verlaine's, and after war broke out in 1914, he secured his foothold on journalism by writing jingoistically, "All of us, all Germans, fear God and nothing else in the world." While writing for the school magazine, he had denuded his prose of rhetorical *appassionato,* but he was not going to waste his opportunity of exciting a large audience. Nothing was to be gained by writing well or by

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revealing ambivalence. He understood that both sides of an ambivalence can be exploited, either separately or together.

While precocious success as a journalist boosted his local prestige, the original poems and ballads he sang, accompanying himself on the guitar, boosted his popularity with both boys and girls. According to one boy who was at school with him, "An irresistible force emanated from the slight, restless figure of the young Brecht. . . . He didn't sing well but with infectious passion, drunk on his own verse, ideas, and images as other people are on wine, and intoxicating his listeners as only youth can." The one-act comedy *He's Driving Out a Devil* is the play that tells us most about his technique of seducing: a peasant-boy's self-confidence appears to be unshakeable. He behaves as though he is so certain of getting what he wants that resistance only amuses him. When Brecht was making passes, he may have been feeling fundamentally insecure and unloved, but he wore a mask of total self-possession so often that his features began to shape themselves to it.

At first his appetite was big enough to match his skill as a hunter: "I go around wanting the entire world to be handed over to me. I want every single thing to be in *my* possession, together with power over the animals, and the basis of my claim is that I can exist only once." This is the Brecht who identified with Baal and imitated Rimbaud: "When you embrace virginal hips, warm life pulses in your hands, and in the fear and bliss of the creature you become a god." "Summer sings out of me with a soft and resonant voice . . . I hate romantic reverie . . . Music gushes out of me. I can't stop it." In his diary Brecht had written, "To be happy, function well, take time for being lazy; to be committed, only one thing is needed: intensity . . . to do everything with all one's body and soul."

If he couldn't entirely eliminate scruples and feelings of guilt, it was important to make sure that they did not impede him and to conceal them from other people and, ideally, from himself too. This was not easy at first, and the 1918 version of *Baal* contains moments of remorse. In the face of his mother's remonstrations, this Baal is sometimes on the point of repenting, and Paula Banholzer was told she would find evidence in the play that Brecht loved her very much.

But the habit of duplicity was deeply ingrained, and with his skill at manipulating strangers into behaving like friends and friends into forgiving treachery, Brecht could afford to behave badly. When his friend Arnolt Bronnen was awarded the Kleist Prize for his play *Patricide,* he loyally asked Herbert Ihering, the judge, to consider two

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of Brecht's plays, and when Brecht refused to accept a share in the prize, all of it was awarded to Brecht. But when *Patricide* was produced in Munich, and Bronnen asked whether he could stay with Brecht and Marianne, he was refused.

With translators Brecht behaved shamelessly. H. R. Hays provided an affidavit to help him gain admission to the United States, translated *Mother Courage* (for the 1941 edition of *New Directions*) and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* without any contract or remuneration, and collaborated on adapting Webster's *Duchess of Malfi,* only to be betrayed when Brecht seized the commercially advantageous alternative of having W. H. Auden as his collaborator. Auden was not told how much Hays had done; Hays was not told when Auden began work on the script.

Piscator, who had given Brecht a job in 1927 and befriended him ever since, was betrayed similarly. When he said that he had succeeded in interesting the Theatre Guild in the possibility of reviving the Schweyk dramatization he had staged in 1928, Brecht offered to collaborate on a new adaptation of the text. But he did not say that he was already working with Kurt Weill on a musical version. He even discussed actors with Piscator, who introduced him to Zero Mostel and mentioned his intention of using Alfred Kreymborg as translator. Brecht then wanted to use Mostel and did use Kreymborg. When Piscator, who had been left out of the arrangement, discovered it, he drafted a furious letter denouncing the "Brechtian swinishness" and threatening to knock him off his "amoral Olympus." The letter he sent was less outspoken.

Ferdinand Reyher, who performed even more favors than Piscator, was treated still worse. He and Brecht met in 1927, and in 1938, before writing *Galileo,* Brecht asked for Reyher's help in selling the film rights to Hollywood. Reyher did his best and was consistently helpful when Brecht arrived in Hollywood, translating his work into English, collaborating with him on film stories and translations, providing introductions, advising on possible directors for *Galileo,* acting, in James K. Lyon's phrase, as his American cicerone. In the spring of 1947, Brecht decided to settle in Switzerland and invited Reyher to come with him, and in 1948 he held out the prospect of having a house in Salzburg with a room in it for Reyher. When he settled instead in East Berlin, he encouraged Reyher to believe he was interested in producing one of his plays at the Berliner Ensemble and in collaborating with him on a new project, perhaps a film. But when he arrived in Berlin, Brecht was too busy to spend much time

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with him. After twenty-three years of believing in their friendship, Reyher returned to New York saying that Brecht was now "top dog" in East Berlin and had "too many people around him, too many women."

Friendship was of little interest to Brecht; he devoted all his social energy to collaboration and to sexual relationships. He never even took time for making friends with his children, and his relationship with his second wife, Helene Weigel, was mainly a professional partnership. When they were running the Berliner Ensemble, she sometimes had to make appointments with him by letter. The friendships with Bronnen, Charles Laughton, and the composer Hanns Eisler were also based on mutual professional need, and even the symbiotic working relationship with Caspar Neher—closer than any of his other relationships with designers, actors, composers, and directors—was not enough to keep their youthful friendship alive. After the war they had little contact except over productions.

Brecht went on using the second person plural (while Weigel used the informal singular) to address actors in the Berliner Ensemble, and even those who were invited to stay at his country house could never draw him into talking about his childhood. When Eisler was with him in Augsburg at the house he grew up in, he made no mention of his mother. Until the end of his life he went on enjoying the companionship of girls (Isot Kilian, Käthe Reichel, Käthe Rülicke) and he was jealously proprietary without allowing them any reciprocal rights. He would telephone them, one by one, early in the evening and then late, to make sure they were at home. His working routine was strenuous and austere; his gregariousness was satisfied by surrounding himself, as he had since boyhood, with admirers who were more disciples than friends.

Though he neither tried nor needed to keep each girlfriend ignorant of the others' existence, something of the old duplicity survived in his political affiliations. In 1941 he turned down the opportunity he was offered of settling in the Soviet Union, and he stayed on in the States for two and a half years after the war ended. In October 1945, when the opportunity to produce *Mother Courage* and *Galileo* in East Berlin first presented itself, he was more interested in the production of *Galileo* with Laughton, and at the end of 1948 when he left the United States, he decided to make his home outside Germany. He settled in Zurich. In April 1949, negotiating for an Austrian passport, he wrote, "I can't just sit myself down in one half of Germany and as a result be dead to the other half." He was granted

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Austrian citizenship, but with his stockpile of unproduced scripts and with his untested theories of acting and producing, he needed a company and, if possible, a theater of his own. Neither would have been put within his reach in the West, but when his Berliner Ensemble was formed, he was hoping to establish moorings for it in all the principal harbors of the German-speaking theater. When the German Democratic Republic was proclaimed in October 1949, he had to give up this hope. But in November, when Wilhelm Pieck took office as the first president of the new republic, the newly fledged Austrian citizen saluted him with a poem entitled, "To My Countrymen."

Brecht's name was of considerable propagandist value to the regime, which invested heavily in the new enterprise, but his freedom was circumscribed. He worked for months on forging Nordahl Grieg's play about the Paris Commune of 1879, *Defeat,* into *The Days of the Commune,* but he was not allowed to produce it, and later it was banned by the Party.

Four years after the company had been created, he still had no theater, and the Ensemble was appearing only three nights a week at the Deutsches Theater. It was particularly unfortunate for Brecht that proletarian dissidence in East Germany was moving toward the same kind of spontaneous uprising he had praised in *The Days of the Commune* just at the moment that the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm was to become available: it had been occupied by the Volksbuhne, for which a new theater had been built. Since the beginning of 1953, Brecht's relationship with the Party had deteriorated, and rumors of friction had leaked into West German newspapers. On June 15, 1953, he wrote to Walter Grotewohl, the minister-president, suggesting that one way of quelling "these nonsensical rumours of discord" would be to announce that the theater would be taken over by the Ensemble. No answer, of course, had arrived by the 17th, when Red Army tanks were used against the rebellious crowds, and Russians machine-gunned strikers when stones were thrown at the police. But Brecht had to choose between expressing solidarity with the workers or supporting the government that had the fate of his theater in its hands. As usual, he did what was expedient.

It is convenient to treat his development as though there was no continuity between the pre-Marxist cult of intensity and the antiheroic plays he wrote in exile, but this is to ignore a tendency which was apparent long before his conversion to Marxism. The second version of *Baal* (1919) is not only less subjective and self-pitying, but also less autobiographical than the first (1918); the third (1926), titled

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*Career of the Man Baal* steps outside the character to treat him as an abnormal case. While rewriting, Brecht asked himself how the events of the play might have been reported in a newspaper. He was instinctively doing what he would later ask actors to do in rehearsal: to stand back, thinking of the character not in the Stanislavskian first person but in the third person, while making the dialogue less dramatic—more like narrative—by interpolating "he said."

It would be simplistic to suggest that he betrayed his characters in the same way that he betrayed his friends, but whether by rewriting, reinterpreting, or altering a production, he tried to conduct sympathy away from Kragler (in *Drums in the Night*), Macheath, Mother Courage, and Galileo. Unlike the hero of *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), the Macheath of *The Threepenny Novel* (1934) is middle-aged, bald, double-chinned, and glamourless, a businessman who runs a chain of shops as an outlet for stolen goods. Polly marries him because she cannot afford an abortion to terminate a pregnancy started by another lover. In the original characterization of Galileo (1939), there is some self-portraiture and even an element of *apologia pro vita sua*. "As a confirmed materialist," wrote Brecht in one of his working notes, "he insists on physical pleasures . . . he works in a sensual way." Like Brecht, this Galileo surrounds himself with disciples, learning himself from the Socratic questions he asks them. He is not prone to feelings of guilt and believes in survival, and there is no condemnation of his guile. We are meant to agree that he did well to outwit the Inquisition and write the *Discorsi*. What sense would there have been in dying as a martyr? The first version of the play was only just finished when the uranium atom was split, and six years later, revising the play after Hiroshima, Brecht tried to condemn Galileo as a traitor to humanity. In the new version the balance of sympathy is shifted. The audience is intended to believe him when he says that as a scientist he had a unique opportunity: if only he had held out against the church, scientists could have evolved "a covenant to devote their knowledge exclusively to the good of mankind." Marx believed that no individual could ever determine the course of history, but Brecht is irrationally blaming Galileo for the way in which scientific investigation has not always been motivated altruistically. And with this new Galileo, the physical self-indulgence is meant to seem unattractive.

Kragler (in *Drums in the Night*) and Mother Courage are two other characters in whom the lust for living, like Baal's, was originally seen as a virtue and later discredited, as if Brecht regretted the amount of libido he had invested in the characterization.

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Brechtian drama is more comic than tragic, and the comedy depends less on wit than on guile and intrigue. Brecht admired Hasek's *Schweyk* more than any other modern novel, and when he eventually came to resurrect the character against the background of World War II, it was noticeable that the new Schweyk spoke in much the same way as Matti (in *Puntila*) and Mother Courage. Even with people of their own class, they seldom say what they are feeling, but embedded in their rambling anecdotes are sharply subversive points.

It is also noticeable that there are no revolutionary heroes in Brecht's plays to match the heroines who are converted to radicalism and violence—St. Joan of the Stockyards, Senora Carrar, Pelagea Vlassova in *The Mother,* Simone Machard. Most of the central male characters are either glorified, like Azdak in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle,* for siding with the people, or vilified for failing to. Galileo is unique in starting as one kind of character and ending as another. The downgrading of Mother Courage came partly in rewriting and partly in production. In the 1939 draft, she lost her elder son because she momentarily let him out of her sight to offer the sergeant a drink; in later drafts she is trying to sell the man a belt. After Therese Giehse had won more sympathy in the Zürich production of 1941 than Brecht wanted her to have, the script was changed, and the 1948 Courage never gives away any of her officers' shirts in scene five. In the 1950 revival, the final line was changed to make the play end with her decision: "I must get back to business."

One way of charting Brecht's development would be to notice changes in his attitude to egoism. The first Baal is an apotheosis of egoism, but having detached himself progressively from the character, Brecht condemned the play in 1954 as "lacking in wisdom." He never wrote the didactic plays he had been planning around 1930 under the title *The Evil Baal the Antisocial Man,* and the word "egoist" was to have featured in the title of another play he never completed, *Downfall of the Egoist Johann Fatzer.* This was started in 1927 and still had not been abandoned in 1930. It represents Brecht's last attempt at a semi-autobiographical play, though he was also trying in it to explain the economic collapse of 1917–19 and the failure of the revolution in Western Europe.

As in *Man is Man,* a group of four soldiers is in danger of severe punishment. Listed as dead during the third year of the war, the crew of a tank stays in hiding. Fatzer, the strongest personality, seems dependent for his survival on the others, but he is pushed forward by their weakness, and eventually he can survive only by leav-

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ing them behind. At first Brecht identified with the wily survivor; the emphasis on his egoism came later. A chorus and an antichorus are introduced to judge Fatzer, and Brecht identifies more with Koch, who is given authority to liquidate the individualist. Later Koch is renamed Keuner, the name Brecht used for his alter ego in *The Stories of Herr Keuner.*

Several of these themes recur in *The Remedial Measure,* the didactic play in which three agitators liquidate a comrade who fails to obey orders. Perhaps the play's secret subject is Brecht's attempt to liquidate the more personal side of his own personality, to make his egoistic features permanently indistinguishable from those of his Marxist mask. Unlike his parents, who had neither the wisdom nor the power to control him, the Control Chorus, representative of the Party, is omniscient and irresistible. The play endorses its assumption that dogma is good, emotion anarchic, and, therefore, evil. A poet, said W. B. Yeats, "is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete." Brecht had not been reborn as an altruist, but he had tried to multiply his egoism into a collective ideal.

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## Stanislaw Baranczak

# THE POLISH COMPLEX

1.

I am standing in line in front of a state-owned "delikatesy" shop. I am 147th in line. The huge queue, extending towards the Freedom Square, suddenly turns down a side street to avoid the road and crosses in the distance with Red Army Street. Rumor has it that a delivery will arrive in a quarter of an hour. Carp or coffee—no one knows for certain. In any case, the lady who is 146th in line convinces me it's worth joining.

A bleak, rainy day, Christmas Eve, 1977. Half an hour ago I finished my third reading of Konwicki's novel, *The Polish Complex,* and went out for a walk to meditate a bit on the book. How did it happen that instead of a peripatetic method I chose to stand in a line? I am not sure myself. Maybe simple symmetry: as in the novel it is Christmas Eve, as in the novel this is Poland, and therefore, as in the novel, one must queue. Whether for ten decagrams of sour coffee, "Extra-Select," for sixty zlotys or for a troublesome fish in your bathtub is the least important issue. A queue is simply ideal for reflecting upon Konwicki's latest novel.

2.

Why does the action of his book—at least the narrative set in the present—mostly take place in a queue? The first answer is embarrassingly simple: because all of Poland today is queuing up. The line, as the central idea of Konwicki's book, is one of those literary strokes of genius which combines everyday ordinariness with symbolic meaning, where a specific situation reflects the general state of society. Such symbolic condensation can be found in many well-known episodes of Polish literature: the banquet in a Warsaw salon, the wedding in a peasant cottage in Bronowice, Professor Pimko's school, and the great ball in the Opera House.

A simple queue—just as the one I am standing in—would not

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Editor's Note: Translated from the Polish by Jaroslaw Anders and Lynne Shapiro.

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suffice as a symbol. The reader has little need for the banal statement that for forty years we Poles have been suffering "temporary difficulties." Konwicki's trick is more treacherous. His line is not a line in front of a food store but a jewelry shop, a "Jubiler." The heroes await not a shipment of butter or meat but a delivery of gold rings from Russia, investments for their devaluating zlotys. A line for gold —an everyday scene in a socialist country! Thus the emphasis shifts from the banality of an economic criticism of the system to a much more interesting insight—in the artistic sense—into the system's most significant feature—absurdity, the Great Nonsense which constitutes the main theme of the novel.

3.

I look at the queue in which I am standing, and, as always on such occasions, I feel anxiety mixed with anger. I was 147th, but what number am I now? The line has swollen; we are no longer standing in single file. The queuers are joined by their friends and the friends of their friends. Always the same. Nothing ever changes in the phenomenology of a line. Take the elderly gentleman less than twenty places in front of me who exclaims with prewar righteousness and postwar helplessness, "But please, ladies and gentlemen, we can't let this get out of hand. We must organize ourselves!" Even he is a constant in a queue. It seems as though I've heard his words many times before. And this old busybody right behind me who says loudly and bitterly, "Yeah, get yourself organized, Grandpa. There won't be enough goods anyway." She too never fails to appear on such occasions. And, as always, the line responds in unison with muted laughter—a laughter of people who at once realize the absurdity of their lives. Briefly this sad laughter unites them, hostile and embroiled, in one big brotherhood.

4.

And here we have our second reason: the line in Konwicki's novel is more than a symbol of the Great Nonsense; it is both a model and a cross section of a society approaching the condition of "Madogism," a term coined by Alexander Zinoviev (a Soviet logician who, forced by illogical reality, became a writer of satire). In Zinoviev's *The Yawning Heights,* the ominous sentence is uttered, "Queuing is the highest possible form of Madogism." Well, things

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still aren't that bad in Poland—a typically Polish consolation—but even here, in our country, the line does begin to symbolize our society. It is a society in which everyone is wronged equally but sees no chance of improvement, even through collective action. Hence, the people transform their frustration into aggression or, simply speaking, begin to hate one another.

Konwicki manages to pinpoint the paradox of our society with striking accuracy. The writer, the worker, the plainclothesman, the private entrepreneur, the student, and a professional queuer hired by some pensioner, all enjoy equal rights in the line for Soviet gold. To make the situation all the more funny and real, the author has them joined by a group of Soviet tourists who seem to have come to Poland for the sole purpose of purchasing Soviet goods. Thus, Konwicki gives us a full range of social classes and strata, with a national conflict to top it all off. Yet, the animosities that arise between the characters do not come from differences of class or nationality. Each would-be customer, whether he is wealthy or belongs to a privileged group, is victimized equally; there simply are no goods to acquire. Nothing can justify our everyday pains, humiliations, and hustles. Not only are higher goals absent—they have been long forgotten—but also the simplest, most palpable things desired, the material goods, are gone. What remains is hatred for anyone who, in this senseless queue, has a better place in line, and even more for anyone shrewd enough to bypass the line altogether.

The most delightful, if this word is appropriate, of Konwicki's inventions is his story of Kojran and Duszek. Immediately after the war, the narrator, Konwicki, who has just converted to a new socialist-realist faith, is tailed by Kojran, who plans to carry out a death sentence passed down by a resistance organization. Meanwhile, Kojran is followed by Duszek, a State Security agent who finally arrests and tortures him. "You might say we were walking Indian file," states Kojran. When I say this dismal plot is "delightful," I mean it gives the purely esthetic delight of watching Konwicki develop this motif to the utmost. All three end up standing in line for gold, Konwicki, Kojran, Duszek, in that order, single file. With their places saved, they go to have a drink together. Years of struggle, assassinations, prison sentences, and torture are put behind and blotted out. Kojran has served his seven years; and Duszek seems to have rejected his past; in any case, he doesn't like to talk about it. Today, they are almost friends. Three sharp human profiles blur, after years, into one nonentity. The values that once motivated them no longer mat-

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ter. In the past, their "Indian file" relation to each other signified a certain social structure, a paradoxical integrity rooted in political antagonism. By stepping on each others' heels they were connected by an official bond of hostility; their clashes were tangible. Today the "Indian file" line, treated as a social model, lacks even this kind of integrity. True, agents of power exist, like Grzesio, furnished with blue denims, but they are not distinguishable by their convictions but rather by their privileged position in line. If they are "nosing" after somebody, it is not ideological fanaticism; it is simply their job. (Jerzy Lec's aphorism is apt here: "He suffered from a persecution mania. He thought someone was following him, and it was only an agent of the State Security.")

A befitting symbol of a conservative hierarchical state would be a human pyramid composed of people standing on one another's shoulders. Similarly, a symbol for an ideal democracy would be a circle of people seated around a table and looking squarely into each others' eyes. The symbol for a state like ours is the queue: one can only see the back of the person standing in front of him, and the only movement is an anxious pushing forward.

5.

Here we go! The door to the "Delikatesy" has just opened, and a human tide, pushing and trampling, surges inside. The last residual forms of social self-discipline disappear. One might say Konwicki's line was more civilized. Not because it was a line for gold, rather, the difference was in numbers. When attendance reaches a critical point, every queue transforms into a mob—a desperate mob, since the supplies will certainly fall short of the demand. I am too far back, but how would I act if I were, say, thirtieth in line and saw only ten hams on the counter.

After the first assault on the door, the commotion subsides. Rumors spread down the line that the shipment hasn't arrived, but is expected soon, maybe in a half hour. Most probably carp.

6.

Well, we'll wait and see. Now that we have more time, let's return to Konwicki. To recapitulate: a queue is both a symbol and model of a society that pursues the most mundane values required to

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justify the pain of daily existence. Since even the simplest of needs cannot be fulfilled—for reasons inherent in the system—the society gradually disintegrates, and the people's frustration is discharged through outbursts of mutual hatred. But not even this hatred is real; the everyday sense of impotence has destroyed all authentic impulses and moral systems. Everything dissolves into the Great Nonsense.

And still, note Konwicki's confession: "I write because in my subconscious there stirs a spark of hope that somewhere there is something, that something endures somewhere, that, in my last instant, Great Meaning will take notice of me and save me from a universe without meaning." It's true, the subject of the novel is not only the Great Nonsense but also human hopes, the struggle to wrestle out of the grasp of the absurd, the anticipation of a miracle, and the efforts to use one's own power to fight the Nonsense.

After all, it is Christmas Eve, the eve of the Miracle. The word "miracle" appears in the novel again and again. "What are you waiting for, a miracle or something?" asks Kojran in the opening scene. To which the narrator answers, "Yes, you're right. I am waiting for a miracle." The colloquial expression suddenly gains here a deeper meaning, and later this phrase becomes a leitmotif. "I'm quietly waiting for a miracle. I'm constantly waiting for an answer," the narrator explains, but other characters cannot respond with any such certainty. And yet almost all of them are on the eve of something that can, supposedly, change their lives. Each cherishes his or her little hope: Kojran flies to America to start a new life the very next day, and Julia, who claims she's already hit the jackpot, hopes to find a man to share her loneliness.

But let us note that nobody really believes in their dreams. No character takes his or her hopes seriously, not even the woman whose only consolation is the thought that people elsewhere are equally bad off. The possibilities of a miracle, of escape from everyday existence, are rejected one after another as illusory. Even the narrator's unexpected sexual adventure, which at first seemed to be just the miracle—the Assumption, with all its angelic attributes—dilutes into profane banality. Such a disappointment is a constant motif in Konwicki's writing. I would call it the "second try complex." In the midst of a sexual act, the hero often experiences metaphysical exaltation, but when he tries to recreate the ecstasy a second time, it's either a complete failure or a disillusionment. The repeated act has only minimal appeal for the hero, and he, "like an old husband," cannot free him-

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self from the ennui. Therefore, not even love is a real escape, and not even death—neither the death that seeks the hero (a coronary), nor the death that the hero pursues at the end of the novel.

Should there be no refuge from the symbolic queue? Is there no escape from the nonsense? There is. Or there might be. But . . .

7.

In the meantime, news reaches us that the carp has been delivered. As if the pressure wasn't enough, the crowd tries to force its way into the shop. Dantesque scenes take place in the bottleneck of the single half of the door that is opened. (Ilf and Pietrov's law can be applied to all Eastern European countries: When an architect plans a number of entrances, only one, at best, is opened.) Cries and insults fly in the air. One other aspect of the phenomenology of the line: the participants push forward as though this could hasten their access to the goods. Therefore, I push too. Besides, being pushed from behind, I have little choice.

8.

There is an escape from Konwicki's line. Or rather, there is a way to rise above the level of the line, rise in the most literal sense. In a previous issue of *Zapis,* Lech Dymarski wrote about the "cosmic perspective" adopted by the narrator to explain the rules governing our planet and our civilization as though to an audience of intelligent aliens who had strayed into our galaxy. Abandoned after the first pages, this perspective might appear as a rather unmotivated literary device. But in Konwicki's case it is not. The narrator acts as if he were, despite the burden of his fifty years, the only man for whom nothing is obvious: he is a man no longer surprised by anything who suddenly decides to understand and explain everything anew, to get down to the bedrock. This perspective appears in Konwicki's earlier books as well. It so happens that it reveals itself most clearly in the two novels which I consider—of course, not only for this reason—to be Konwicki's best achievements prior to *The Polish Complex, Wniebowstapienie* (*The Ascension*) and *Anthropos-Specter-Beast.* In both, the narrator appears tabula rasa, as a person with a limited knowledge of the world's rules. In both, this innocence is provided with a rational explanation: the narrator of *Anthropos-Specter-Beast* is a child; and the story of *Wniebowstapienie* is told by a man, who wakes in the center of

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Warsaw with a broken skull and partial amnesia. This is similar to the philosophical parables of the eighteenth century, where cultural strangeness (*Persian Letters* by Montesqieu) or the status of a simple man provided such a point of view.

In *The Polish Complex* things are different. The narrator is neither a naive simpleton nor a visitor from another land. He knows his world like the back of his hand. Nothing can astonish him any more, not even the French anarchist who came to Poland to seek true freedom, or the black man who speaks Warsaw cockney and discusses Lithuanian dishes. And yet he is up against the wall of the Great Nonsense, the only thing he cannot cope with. He can only try to rise spiritually above the wall and regard our moron planet from the cosmic perspective of an alien. It is only then, perhaps, that he might ascertain the real proportions between the meaningful and the absurd in the life of the Earthlings and in his own life.

9.

They've started selling the carp. The line creeps forward, and this limited movement brings consolation. At least something is happening; the line is not as senseless as it was before; we are approaching some goal. But at the same time anxiety grows. The basic feature of attractive merchandise is its scarcity. Since the carp is being sold, sooner or later the supply will run out, and therefore, we may not be able to get it. Symptoms of panic appear; the line becomes even more shapeless. Not only do the queuers push forward, some try to bypass the line, and others lean out so as to have at least a glimpse of the objects they desire. My well-trained eyes register the common phenomena: an elderly man, with great dignity and little confidence, produces his handicapped citizen's card. He meets an unyielding wall of arms and elbows and angry comments, "Cripples, stay at home!" From the front of the line, where taller heads can already see the counter, furious cries are heard, "One fish per customer! Look at that! She's stuffing her shopping bag!" The lucky ones who've already made their purchase push laboriously towards the exit, fighting the reverse current of people. They are especially disdainful of the crowd. They loudly complain about the lack of common courtesy and, reaching the street, show each other their torn buttons. We regard them with genuine hatred.

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10.

Yes, from the viewpoint of an alien, one might comprehend the proportions of human flights and falls. But at this point the deepest, most fundamental dilemma of the book appears. Among the many absurdities of our civilization, the narrator discovers the most astonishing one: instead of uniting rationally, humanity has ruptured itself into groups called nations, distinguishable only by the language they use. This trifling difference has been the cause of bloody wars, imperial oppression, insurgencies, and uprisings.

And suddenly we must abandon the cosmic perspective; there is no retreat from one's own earthly self. Konwicki's self is molded from Lithuania and Poland, from their common and separate histories, from their suffering and hopes. At this point it becomes obvious that not even the most intelligent alien will understand what our freedom is and how people feel when deprived of it. If freedom did not exist, it would be difficult to understand that the escape from the absurd (which pushes us into the "highest form of Madogism—the queue") should not be sought in naive expectations of miracles nor in philosophical elevations but, ironically, in a domain which has known so many absurdities, errors, failures, and betrayals. In other words, a Polish writer—if he is not a blind nationalist—can see best that the history of an oppressed nation abounds in irrationality. At the same time, a Polish writer has more occasions to single out those situations in which, against all odds, people have managed to conquer the absurd and to create meaning. They are the unknown people who, in Konwicki's words, "drowned in the sea of anonymity fulfilling their tough human duty, people who, in the darkness of despair, barred the roads against the floodwaters of evil, time, or history with their own bones, who in pain and labor gave birth to me so that I could shout as loud as I could, so that I could howl to the very ends of heaven and earth, so that I could save myself and God."

To show those who fulfilled this "tough human duty," Konwicki calls on history by way of two sudden and seemingly unmotivated sub-plots set in 1863. One story concerns Zygmunt Mineyko, the leader of a handful of insurgents who disperse after the first shots are fired. Mineyko himself is delivered by his compatriots into the hands of a Russian gendarme. The other is about Traugutt, the dictator of the failed uprising, who knows he has been defeated but, nevertheless, must fulfill his duties to the end. Both the minor insurgent and the leader have lost, but in a sense they are both winners. When

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Traugutt explains, "I don't know if there was any sense in it. I do know that it had to be done," he gives, perhaps, the only answer possible to those who question the sense of struggling against the Great Nonsense.

Konwicki inserts two striking episodes in order to stress that the compulsion to struggle is an unquestionable fact and that one must not be "ashamed of a fondness for freedom. Even though it was . . . the freedom which leads to ruin." The first episode is the discovery of a desperate letter from a friend living in a remote country, which could well be Bulgaria, Uganda, or Kazakhstan (a country from which freedom was so completely banished that the question of its meaning and value no longer troubles anyone). The second episode is more restrained and ordinary, although, in my opinion, more astounding—it may be the most alarming scene in the whole book. Here the narrator incidentally meets his alter ego, a relative from beyond the eastern border, a Socialist Labor hero, a foreman of a kolhoz piggery in Soviet Lithuania. When asked, "Are you satisfied with your life?" he answers, "I never think about it. It could be worse. . . . Man is created to work. . . . The rest is bunk."

Their destiny will be ours, Konwicki seems to say, if we too stop asking ourselves that very question again and again, if we get accustomed to the Great Nonsense, if we sink into the wool of silence, which so far is our only right.

> Previously a slave was entitled to cry out, today the slave has been assured the right of silence, muteness. Crying out brought relief as it does for a newborn baby. Silence and muteness cause degeneration, they suffocate, kill. Previously when a captive nation regained its freedom, it was not hindered in joining the great family of free nations. Today, if by chance it is set free, it will no longer be fit for life and will perish from the poisons accumulated during the dark night of captivity.

11.

I'm finally inside the state-owned "delikatesy," and now we learn that the carp is sold out! The news has the speed and impact of an explosion. What follows in unison is a moan of disappointment. So, we will have no carp on our table this Christmas Eve. Once again we are cheated, fooled, humiliated. No miracle this time.

We leave the shop in silence.

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**Victor Erlich**

# THE POLITICS OF RUSSIAN FUTURISM

Let me begin by citing two totally incompatible propositions: "Italian futurism is an *ars vivendi,* while Russian futurism is solely concerned with art. Italian futurism is a social movement; Russian futurism is an upheaval in art." So wrote the avant garde poet and critic, Vadim Shershenevich (incidentally one of the few Russian futurists who welcomed Marinetti to Moscow in 1914) in a pamphlet, "The Green Street." Only two years later, in 1918, N. Punin, writing in the short-lived Kom-Futurist journal, *The Art of the Commune,* intoned, "Russian futurism is not only an artistic movement but an entire worldview which bases itself upon Communism and ultimately leaves it behind."

Clearly, one's view of the relationship between the futurist revolution in Russian art and revolutionary politics depends, to paraphrase a common saying, on what futurist newspapers you read. More seriously, it hinges on one's sense of the chronological and substantive scope of the phrase "Russian futurism." For the moment, I would like to construe this scope rather broadly. Few will deny that the innovative thrust of Russian futurism found its fullest and most characteristic expression in the cubo-futurist offensive of 1910–1915. Yet it would be wrong to ignore the post-1917 vicissitudes of the Russian futurist or neofuturist movement, if for no other reason but that to do so would be to lose sight of the achievement and the fate of the best known and most resonant poet of Russian futurism, Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Let us return to the launching. It is a matter of record that at its inception Russian futurism presented itself primarily as the revolution of the word. In its initial rationale, the Russian equivalent of *parole in libertá* loomed larger than the mimetic or thematic emphases in Marinetti's 1909 manifesto. It also loomed larger than his much-quoted call to overhaul poetic language in order to reflect and celebrate the new realities and to capture the dynamism of the new technological civilization. In the early manifestoes of the Russian cubo-futurists,

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most notably in "A Trap for the Judges" and "Declaration of the Word as Such," subject matter is relegated to a secondary status. Content is proclaimed an epiphenomenon. "New verbal form creates a new content and not vice versa." It is not the radically changed quality of life that calls for a new poetic vocabulary; it is the new poetic language freed from the shackles of grammatical conventions and poetic cliches that ushers in new thematic clusters such as urbanism. In this view, poetry is not about reality but about language; it is an exploration, a celebration, a constant renewal of "the word as such." In V. Kamenskij's words, it is "the verbal wedding rites," a savoring of the outward—graphic and phonic—characteristics of the word, at the expense of its "traditional subservience of meaning," if necessary. The procedure of using "chopped-up words, half-words, and their whimsical intricate combinations" which became known as *zaum'* (trans-sense language); the call for the "release of phonic energy"; and especially A. Kruchonykh's much-touted experiments with robustly unmellifluous nonsense syllables (*dr, bul, scyr*) are at least as akin to the dadaism of Tzvetan Tzara as to the futurism of F. T. Marinetti. Early Russian futurism was ostensibly a challenge to the turn-of-the-century mystiques, most notably to the Russian symbolists' tendency to treat poetry as a gateway to "mystery." Yet the gospel of the "self-valuable word" appeared to repudiate any and all messages—whether esoteric or social—and any and all attempts to use poetic language for extra-esthetic purposes.

To be sure, this is only part of the story. For one thing, the ultra-verbalistic or "dadaist" emphasis was more pronounced in Aleksej Kruchonykh or Velimir Khlebnikov than it was in Vladimir Mayakovsky. More relevantly, Mayakovsky's deeply felt rage against the world he never made drove him early toward an increasing involvement with the Russian revolutionary movement. In his remarkable "Cloud in Trousers," one of the most explosive love poems in the language, the powerfully projected sense of emotional frustration, dispossession, and homelessness blends with an ardent anticipation of a liberating upheaval.

When the longed for historic storm finally broke, Mayakovsky was ready to give his all to the revolution or, in his own words, "to offer [his] sonorous powers of the poet to you, the attacking class."

Mayakovsky's verses written in the first years of the revolution breathe almost physical exhilaration. In the city in turmoil, in the square gripped by the revolutionary fever, he found an ideal resonator for his thundering voice, for his boisterous oratory. When routine

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was displaced and business as usual discarded he felt at home amid the chaos and flux. Joyously Mayakovsky summoned the futurists, "the drummers and the poets," into the street. He celebrated the "second tidal flood" in the powerful staccato of "Our March," a rare instance of nearly nonobjective political poetry where bursts of released consonantal energy provide an auditory correlative for revolutionary euphoria. He sang the imminent world revolution in a satirical morality play, "Mystery-Bouffe," and an exuberant communist epic, "A Hundred Fifty Million."

As the excitement of "ten days that shook the world" gave way to grimy slugging, Mayakovsky persisted in his total commitment. No propagandist chore was too menial for him. He wrote marches and versified slogans and early Soviet commercials which, owing to his verbal inventiveness and wit, were often more effective than many more ambitious efforts of *engagé* Soviet poets. He produced thousands of posters and captions which derided the opponents' regime and eulogized Soviet institutions, including the dread Cheka. He debunked any poetry that was not immediately useful, saying, "In our day only he's a poet who will write a march and a slogan."

At times his eagerness to serve occasioned such lines as these, written in 1925, "I want the Gosplan [The State Economic Planning Commission] to sweat in debate assigning me goals a year ahead . . . I want the pen to be on the par with the bayonet and Stalin to deliver his Politburo reports about verse in the making as he would about pig iron and the smelting of steel."

Such poetry can be interpreted in more than one way. Was Mayakovsky affirming the importance of poetry in the only language which Russia's iron age could understand—that of technology and political expediency? Or was this rather another expression of the futurist iconoclast's urge to depoeticize poetry? Perhaps. Yet the spectacle of an erstwhile impudent, bohemian artist asking the Party for guidance is a disturbing one. Let me note that this stance was part of a larger irony: the neofuturist group, Left Front of the Arts (LEF), of which Mayakovsky was one of the leading members, contrived to combine a spirited defense of avant garde values with blatant political instrumentalism. Most Western discussions of this embattled faction tend to emphasize the former rather than the latter. There is no denying that the LEF spokesmen waged a brave, indeed a vehement, campaign against the aesthetic neoconservatism of the cultural bureaucrats. But it is equally true that in their

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eagerness to subordinate literature and art to the exigencies of Soviet propaganda, they sided time and again with the bleak proletarian "zealots" rather than with the open-minded, if not always sophisticated, interpreters of Marxist doctrine. Thus a movement launched to the accompaniment of loud claims to the total autonomy and self-reference of poetic language was now serving as one of the vehicles of the relentless politicization of Soviet culture, which ultimately proved destructive to all creative impulse.

In the meantime, Mayakovsky's self-imposed bondage to a mythicized future was taking a heavy toll on both the man and the poet. By the middle of the twenties, the ebullience of "Our March" had yielded to profound weariness—an "amortization of the heart and soul," in Mayakovsky's words—and occasional exasperation with the ever-receding millennium:

> And when the sun like a fattened hog
> will rise over the future without beggars and cripples
> I will be rotting under a fence
> along with a dozen of my colleagues.

In 1930 Mayakovsky shot himself through the heart. His suicide marked the end of an era. It signaled the collapse of an increasingly precarious alliance between the regime ushered in by the Russian Revolution and the Russian artistic avant garde. While in architecture constructivism was granted a few more years of grace, in literature, painting, and criticism, formal innovation and the modernist quest were arrested by a bureaucratic fiat.

As for Mayakovsky, the causes of his self-destructive act appear to lie deeper than in mere political disenchantment. What was at issue, I believe, was a sense of an existential project gone awry. In his relentless reaching toward a future totally discontinuous with a hateful past—a future in which an artist of immense poetic gifts and insatiable emotional hungers could live, love, and create at the highest pitch of intensity—Mayakovsky had embraced Lenin's surgically clean break with the old and found himself trapped in a grimly authoritarian blend of political utopianism. As he was about to pull the trigger, he must have known that the express train which he had boarded some fifteen years earlier was hurtling to a wrong destination.

In a moving essay, written in the wake of Mayakovsky's death, Roman Jakobson spoke eloquently for the futurist generation, "We

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strained toward the future too impetuously and avidly to leave any past behind us. . . . We lost the sense of the present. . . ." "As for the future," Jakobson concluded somberly, "it doesn't belong to us either." In one sense Mayakovsky's friend and most astute interpreter was right. The immediate future belonged not to the rebellious artists but to the hard-faced political operatives who proved as philistine as they were ruthless. Nevertheless, the creative élan epitomized by the names of Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, Malevich and Larionov, Goncharova and Tatlin will remain one of the most stirring moments in the history of the modernist imagination.

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An *Interdisciplinary* Journal

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**Erika Apfelbaum and Ana Vasquez**

# THE "MADWOMEN" OF THE PLACE DE MAI

Coups and military dictatorships in Uruguay and Chile since 1973 have given rise to torture and assassinations, creating an international public scandal. In 1976, the Argentine military applied the lessons of their comrades' experience: no prisoners, no death sentences, no public executions—but, in their place, "disappearances." Sequester suspects without leaving a trace, sequester even the witnesses, assassinate them and hide the bodies—and there you have a new governmental method of putting the lid on protest.

Is it possible that one's child—or a whole family—could just disappear overnight? The relatives of the "disappeared" ran to police headquarters, to the commissioner's office, to the hospital—all the hospitals—to the Ministry of the Interior; and everywhere they got the same polite yet indifferent reply: nobody knows a thing. Caught up in an infernal cogwheel, without direction, they no longer knew whom to appeal to. No one was responsible.

In the face of such an absurd new reality, neighbors and even friends began to wonder. "Her son has disappeared. . . . He certainly must have done *something*!" Law-abiding women, respectable mothers, kept up their individual searches, trying to break through the institutional indifference. They saw each other daily in the same interminable lines; they got to know each other, and they compared experiences: nothing but unassailable bureaucrats, evasive and ambiguous answers. And so they decided to blockade, in a silent patrol, the forbidden place. "One Thursday in April of 1977, at five in the afternoon, fourteen women . . . mothers whose children have disappeared . . . demonstrated their suffering at the Place de Mai and refused to be turned away without getting some answers. . . ." reported J. P. Bousquet ("Les folles de la place de Mai," *Stock 2,* Paris, 1982).

As long as they came individually, in secret, to a ministerial office, demanding an accounting—"Where is he? What have you done with him?"—one could show them out on the excuse of administrative protocol. The woman was simply given to understand that her

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Editor's Note: Translated from the French by Mary Barno.

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discernment was faulty, that this close relative or son, though from a respectable family, nevertheless did actually engage in clandestine activities unknown to his intimates, and that certainly he had been taken and possibly even executed by the "others." Fostering doubt is a perennial strategy of the authorities; undermine reality, disorient, place in doubt the usual means of recourse, and in so doing reinforce the "natural" tendency of denial in the face of horror. (The accounts by survivors of Nazi genocide corroborate the use of this strategy.)

In fact, a disappearance, as long as it appeared to be one in a series of isolated, individual events, was felt to be a shameful sickness, something to hide. Silence and self-imposed isolation, for fear of social condemnation, were generally the first reaction. And those who avoided falling into this trap were often paralyzed by the fear of putting their children in danger through some action that might prove untimely or sensational.

Numbering fourteen at the outset, the women of the Place de Mai restrained themselves in response to the "ordinary," insidious violence of which they were daily the victims. Perhaps it was an act of desperation in the face of the legal course they had already pursued in vain, and for which nothing in their previous experience had prepared them. At every stage of their struggle, they surmounted their fears that any next step would do more harm than good, and, ignoring all prohibitions, they put themselves outside the law. They comforted themselves with their private conviction of the legitimacy of their demand (What have you done with him?) and in their public, collective effort.

* * *

What do these women symbolize, who silently made their rounds about the Place de Mai? By their *collective* presence they shattered and revealed, to the rest of the world, the thinly-veiled lie that had shrouded the disappearances, bringing into full view the political and social implications of such disappearances.

Consequently, the authorities could no longer simply dismiss them. Certainly, these women had transgressed official orders in blockading the Place de Mai; even worse, the restraining order against them had undeniable political implications. But at the same time, women and their status as mothers conferred dignity on them, an additional respectability that was incompatible with the image of political dissidence. How could one confront the challenge inherent

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in this assemblage of forty to sixty-year-old women without violating the rules of respect due to mothers? (Such a transgression is particularly unacceptable in a culture, impregnated with machismo, that consecrates a veritable cult of motherhood.) Even dictators have to legitimize their acts of violence. What strategy, then, could the authorities adopt in response to these contradictory exigencies—the double bind—that held them in a vise grip?

The answer was simple and scathing: obviously these women were *mad.* A label of madness, they rationalized, ought to be sufficient to stop the movement, to deal the fatal blow. If physical violence toward these women was socially unacceptable, the juxtaposition of "women/mothers/madwomen" was not. For the authorities, it appeared to be a stroke of strategic genius. A madwoman is by definition a noninterlocutor, someone whose words are meaningless. By a single stroke, then, they relegated these women to their one socially tolerable role, that of mothers (mothers mad with grief, perhaps), and at the same time disqualified their actions. This logic allowed them to erase the political dimension of the women's demonstration, and above all to avoid accepting the precedent of having such a political action go unpunished. To label a woman "mad" was to send her back to her proper, nonexistent role in the social and political scheme; and it rendered pointless any physical violence, which generally supposes the existence of a defined enemy.

The strategy might have succeeded and silenced, once and for all, these women who otherwise were not in the habit of making public demonstrations. But, undoubtedly, the force and determination that can arise from fear and desperation were underestimated, as was the exhilarating feeling of being no longer alone, of participating in a shared confrontation as a means of resisting the absurdity that the authorities thought to pass off as reality.

Reversing the authorities' strategy, the women appropriated the label for themselves—"we are madwomen". In truth, they have been helped by the ambience of their own sexuality and social status as women. But beyond this, the women have fashioned it into an offensive weapon. By guarding the trademark of "madwomen," they have reinforced the political nonstatus conferred on women and in doing so, have made possible the creation of an unassailable and irrepressible movement, one that finds its power in the nonpolitical and nonthreatening characterization that the authorities themselves have assigned to it. At the same time, their movement, in all its subversiveness, gives itself a certain impunity by situating itself outside

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the dichotomy between legitimacy and illegitimacy, where it can continue to undermine the regime's claims of legality.

Paradoxically, by appropriating a stigma and reversing its meaning, progressing from assigned madness to self-proclaimed madness, the "madwomen" established a successful method of public protest. The action taken by the mothers at the Place de Mai has thwarted one of the traps of the ideological hold of power (in this case, military power) over a people by opening the way to a new form of resistance. Today, the madwomen of the Place de Mai have an institution all their own.

*Coming in*

**PARTISAN REVIEW**

- Selections from the *Memoires* of Raymond Aron
- Milan Kundera: *The Legacy of the Sleepwalkers*
- Frank Kermode on the decline of the man of letters
- Diana Pinto: *Letter from Paris*
- Steven Marcus on George Orwell
- John Elderfield on contemporary art and modern memory
- Juan Goytisolo: *The Cuban Story*
- Barbara Rose on Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock
- Dominique Moisi: *France and the Limits of Consensus*
- Schlomo Avinieri: Letter from Israel
- Mark Shechner on Wilhelm Reich
- An enlarged fiftieth anniversary issue

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# BOOKS

## SAD MUSIC

**THE STORIES OF BERNARD MALAMUD. By Bernard Malamud.** Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $17.95.

Any doubts we may have had about Bernard Malamud's stature as a modern master should be dispelled by this collection of his stories. This personal selection of twenty-five stories presents Malamud at his best—as a writer of eloquent and poignant vignettes. Though Malamud has published seven novels, each one touched with his distinctive laconic grace, the short story remains the purest distillation of his abiding leitmotif: the still, sad music of humanity. Typically, the Malamud story is an epiphany of disappointment and failure, a document of the half-life—the shabby region of mediocre existence just a notch above pure disaster—bathed in the melodies of despair, in the taut, concise adagios of woe. By and large, however, Malamud's range of characters and situations has been too narrow to sustain longer constructions. Lacking variety and any feel for the architecture of sustained fiction, his novels hold the note of sorrow too long, until what had begun as a lamentation ends as a *kvetch.* But in the short story, Malamud achieves an almost psalmlike compression. He has been called the Jewish Hawthorne, but he might just as well be thought a Jewish Chopin, a prose composer of preludes and nocturnes.

The Malamud character is one we've long since come to recognize: the underground man transposed into a small merchant or retiree or pensioner. He is commonly alone, or beset by family, creditors, or customers (he seldom has friends). He runs a grocery, a deli, a candy store where the cash register is always empty and the accounts receivable book full. His sons, if he has sons, avoid him; his daughters, like Lear's, are ungrateful, and there is no Cordelia to love him in spite of himself. He may have a heart condition, like Mendel in "Idiot's First," or Marcus the tailor in "The Death of Me," or Mr. Panessa in "The Loan," or he may take his own life, like Rosen the ex-coffee salesman in "Take Pity," or Oskar Gassner in "The Jewish Refugee." At his most wretched he is a Jewbird, black as a caftan, fishy as a herring, and cursed/blessed with the powers of flight, though he longs only for the comforts of a home. With few exceptions, he is miserable, without hope, and waiting for death. In-

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deed, not only does the typical Malamud story end with death, but the keynote story in this collection, "Take Pity," begins with death, one that releases the character into a chamber of heaven that looks remarkably like a furnished room. Even death, it seems, brings no elevation.

This makes for anything but happy reading, and we might well ask why anyone would bother with a writer so insistently depressive, who peoples his stories with characters who exist for most of us only in memory and nightmare. That is not a simple question to answer, but we might begin with Malamud's own words. In one of the stories in this collection, "Man in the Drawer," Levitansky, a Russian-Jewish writer whose work cannot be published in the Soviet Union, entices an American journalist, Howard Harvitz, who is touring Russia, to read some of his stories. Harvitz, after much shilly-shallying, reads them and renders an approving judgment: "I like the primary, close-to-the-bone quality of the writing. The stories impress me as strong if simply wrought; I appreciate your feeling for the people and at the same time the objectivity with which you render them. It's sort of Chekhovian in quality, but more compressed, sinewy, direct, if you know what I mean." Levitansky, it appears, is a portrait of what Malamud himself might have been and have suffered had fate seen fit to send his grandparents east to Russia rather than west to America, and these terms of praise are Malamud's own terms for what is strong in his art.

Sinewy, direct, simply wrought, close to the bone—Malamud's writing is all that, but an appreciation of his simplicity takes us only so far toward a definition of his appeal, which has, I think, two other sources: an apprehension that touches some core of panic in all of us and his music. "Man in the Drawer" exhibits a dimension of the Malamud world that powerfully draws us in. Levitansky is the nightmare Jew, but he is also Harvitz's semblable, his alter ego, the victim who, but for an accident of fortune, might be himself. Plainly, he is *our* other self. Malamud's tenement Jews, his Russian-Jewish writers, his lonely pensioners, his forsaken fathers and embittered children are all stained by that tincture of possibility. Even in the midst of plenty, in this best of all possible diasporas, a portion of every Jew stands poised for flight and expecting the worst. It is Malamud, more than any other Jewish writer, who retains that imagination of disaster and speaks the old dialects of loneliness, confinement, and exile.

The music of Malamud's writing is a curious one—dark and

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brooding but not overly abundant or reliably melodic. One comes repeatedly upon passages that are just plain clumsy, as though Malamud had forgotten the syntax of English or pieced together his own upon Yiddish syntactical patterns. He is no Bellow or Roth or Updike with an endless fund of bright phrases at his elbow; his idiom is a limited one that has not noticeably grown in the thirty-four years he has been writing. He writes in what might be called basic English, now lyrical, now stumbling, reminding us more than a little of Isaac Babel in his regard for simple truths and his studied neglect of ornamentation.

Within that limited budget of words, however, Malamud achieves in his stories a *Kleine Nachtmusik,* a simple melodic weariness that envelops his characters like a syrup.

> Davidov, the Census-taker, opened the door without knocking, limped into the room, and sat wearily down. Out came his notebook and he was on the job. Rosen, the ex-coffee salesman, wasted, eyes despairing, sat motionless, cross-legged, on his cot. The square, clean but cold room, lit by a dim globe, was sparsely furnished: the cot, a folding chair, small table, old unpainted chests—no closets but who needed them?—and a small sink with a rough piece of green, institutional soap on its holder—you could smell it across the room. The worn black shade over the single narrow window was drawn to the ledge, surprising Davidov.

It takes us a while to comprehend that Rosen is dead and that death is no release, just a pane of one-way glass between himself and the living. The green institutional soap, the worn shade, the cot are the furniture of his life and of his heart, which has all the color and warmth of a cold-water flat. Alfred Kazin speaks of Malamud's poverty as "an aesthetic medium . . . coloring everything with its woebegone utensils, its stubborn immigrant English, its all-circulating despair." One might want to say that defeat, not just poverty, is the enveloping medium, but Kazin's general point stands: some depletion of the spirit—call it poverty, call it defeat—not only commands the situation but choreographs every act, every speech, every word on the page. Through seas of sadness, Malamud's characters swim like fish.

The initial impression Malamud gave in the 1950s, with his early stories in *The Magic Barrel* and the novels *The Natural* and *The Assistant,* was that of being a purveyor of Jewish admonitions. The

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novels in particular cast long, didactic shadows and ask us to judge some of their characters as deserving of their trials. Moreover, *The Natural* and *The Assistant,* as well as stories like "The Lady of the Lake," "Girl of My Dreams," and "The Magic Barrel," broadcast suggestions of a sexual moralism as well, though its exact nature is never spelled out. The sexual moralist in Malamud has been largely excluded from this collection, and where sex turns up in a moral equation, as it does in "God's Wrath" and "The Magic Barrel," it posits mysteries rather than precepts.

And yet Malamud *is* a moralist and an insistent one, though the law to which he binds his characters has little in it of noticeably Jewish content. It is the law of simple charity and compassion. Most of his characters either earn their misery through hardheartedness or are the victims of others'. Kessler, the former egg candler of "The Mourners," is quarrelsome and a troublemaker and is self-isolated in his tenement apartment. Rosen, the ex-coffee salesman in "Take Pity," has been driven to the grave by a widow who, out of misplaced pride, rejects his charity. Glasser, the retired shamus in "God's Wrath," has had poor luck with his children, and we may guess without being told that they had had no better luck with him. In story after story coldness is returned for love, a warm heart is battered by a cold one. The word "no" is the most powerful and bitter word in all of Malamud.

Malamud is quintessentially a Jewish writer, though there is nothing of religious belief and only the shards of ritual to be found in his writing and only *shmatas* of Jewish culture or history. Yet, for all that, his writing is so impregnated with Jewishness—as distinct from Judaism—that there can be no mistaking it. Sometimes it is the spectral Jewishness of Singer and Chagall, but more commonly it is the melancholy Jewishness of Roman Vishniac's photos of the old country in its last hours. In his modest and laconic style of narrative, Malamud has found the exact prose equivalent of the dull light and gray tones of Vishniac's world, a world exhausted by siege and conscious of its defeat.

Perhaps Malamud's Jewishness is best understood in terms of Matthew Arnold's definition of Hebraism, "strictness of conscience." By such a definition, Malamud is our leading Hebraist of letters, for strictness of conscience is as much his abiding theme as sorrow is his abiding disposition. But though Malamud treats it as a requirement of civilized existence, he often renders it as a curse, a habit of withholding that interdicts the normal flow of human feelings. Many

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of Malamud's characters treat others with a rabbinical harshness, though one detached from any conception of a sacramental life or, for that matter, a clear moral intention. They habitually ward off intimacy and often give the appearance of performing archaic rites that they have long since ceased to understand. A textbook approach to their "problem" might call them compulsive-neurotics, for they are case studies of conscience gone haywire.

In a Malamud story, conscience beyond an individual's need or capacity or right to do good propels the argument. In "Take Pity," Rosen recites to a census-taker in heaven the tale of his failures at charity toward the wife of a grocery store owner. She would not heed his advice to liquidate the store; she refused his offer of a place to stay when the store went bankrupt; she recoiled at his proposal of marriage; she returned money anonymously given, knowing it was from Rosen. But, determined Rosen, *"I will give."*

> "I went then to my lawyer and we made out a will that everything I had—all my investments, my two houses that I owned, also furniture, my car, the checking account—every cent would go to her, and when she died, the rest would be left for the two girls. The same with my insurance. They would be my beneficiaries. Then I signed and went home. In the kitchen I turned on the gas and put my head in the stove."
>
> "Let her say no now."

This is charity unto death. By what right does Rosen impose these unwanted gifts upon the unwilling widow? And by what law of self-reliance does she so obdurately decline what is offered her solely out of love? Both Rosen and the Widow Kalish are stark examples of a Hebraism so advanced, so unleavened by reflection or sweetness and light as to be the literal death of one and the spiritual death of the other.

> Davidov, scratching his stubbled cheek, nodded. . . . He got up and, before Rosen could cry no, idly raised the window shade.
>
> It was twilight in space but a woman stood before the window.
>
> Rosen with a bound was off his cot to see.
>
> It was Eva, staring at him with haunted beseeching eyes. She raised her arms to him.
>
> Infuriated, the ex-salesman shook his fist.

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> "Whore, bastard, bitch," he shouted at her. "Go 'way from here. Go home to your children."
>
> Davidov made no move to hinder him as Rosen rammed down the window shade.

Strictness of conscience has proven to be a moral cul-de-sac for both. Malamud's Jewish characters, one often feels, are automatons of conscience and fanatics. It is a commonplace of criticism that they are ruined by circumstance, but it is less often observed that those circumstances are helped along by their own narrowness and rigidity.

So deeply ingrained is this woe that it seems virtually biological—a mourning bound in helixes within every cell. But in the first postwar decade, it had the full sanction of the times and was wellnigh universal among Jewish writers and intellectuals. The sorrow that penetrates to the bone in Malamud was the mood of a generation of Jewish writers who had been raised on immigrant poverty and worldwide depression and brought abruptly to adulthood by the holocaust. Low spirits came as naturally to them as hunger or ambition or breath.

But for some of those writers sorrow was a transient mood and a burden, and they were glad to be relieved of it in the 1950s when the prevailing conditions of life would no longer sustain their Dostoevskian migraines. As a character in an unfinished novel by Saul Bellow announced in 1950, "You heard me tell my old aunt a while back when she asked me what I wanted, that I didn't want to be sad any more." Bellow, his stethoscope pressed to the bosom of the *zeitgeist,* had uttered that sentence on behalf of a new mood which held that "being sad is being disfigured," and while in 1950 he was still tentative enough to put those sentiments in the mouth of a mental patient in a novel he could not complete, three years later he would confirm them in a full-blown festival of high spirits, *The Adventures of Augie March.*

Throughout the fifties and the sixties, Malamud stood aside from the cavalcade of cheerfulness and let it pass unapplauded. Though he *would* take detours into sunnier climes and endeavor to compose in a more robust key, most notably in *Pictures of Fidelman,* he never strayed far from his sorrow. Throughout the fifties, while other writers in the *Partisan Review* orbit were spreading the good news about "Our Country and Our Culture," Malamud was prowling the tenements of the imagination for vistas of misfortune, scenes of Old World pathos in New World ghettos. His major novel of that

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decade was *The Assistant,* his story of Jewish and Italian self-immolation in a failing grocery store. If the Kennedy era and the years of the counter-cultural revolution made any impression on his mood, it is not visible in his stories of the sixties. One single note sounds long and uninterrupted through the stories of three decades: the note of mourning.

*Collected Stories* is a book of mourning, an anthology, one might say, of elegies. Even where there is no death, characters cloak themselves in talliths and recite Kaddishes for the living, as Salzman the matchmaker does for his client, Leo Finkle, in "The Magic Barrel" and Kessler the egg candler and Gruber the landlord do for themselves at the end of "The Mourners." Malamud has written stories of other kinds but has selected these for reissue, as if to honor that region of his imagination that is most accustomed to grief. The singularity of this grieving marks the book as a testament, a memorial, we may suppose, to the world that disappeared into the crematoria of Auschwitz, the memory hole of Russia, the suburbs of America. This book, then, is an act of Yiskor, an admonition to remember.

But such a reading leaves certain things unexplained: the broken bonds between children and parents and the resounding NO that frustrates every desire, every generous act. This sorrow, appended to history though it may be, is also unmistakably personal and was planted in the heart before it ever found its image in the world; we may be certain of that. But this heartache, whatever the source, has led Malamud to a deep identification with the tears of the Jewish past and an affection, to the point of love, for a world that his father's generation fled as best it could: the tenement, the candy store, the hand-to-mouth hardships of immigrant life. All Jewish writers respond in some degree to this undertow of ghetto misery—but only Malamud has canonized it.

This steady allegiance to a single grief, despite all the vicissitudes of personal fortune and historical change, calls to mind Isaac Rosenfeld's words about Abraham Cahan's David Levinsky, a man who in *The Rise of David Levinsky* courts a singular aridity of spirit that he himself does not comprehend.

> Because hunger is strong in him, he must always strive to relieve it; but precisely because it is strong, it has to be preserved. It owes its strength to the fact that for so many years everything that influenced Levinsky most deeply—say, piety and mother

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> love—was inseparable from it. For hunger, in this broader, rather metaphysical sense of the term that I have been using, is not only the state of tension out of which the desires for relief and betterment spring; precisely because the desires are formed under its sign, they become assimilated to it, and convert it into the prime source of all value, so that the man, in his pursuit of whatever he considers pleasurable and good, seeks to return to his yearning as much as he does to escape it.

Like Levinsky, Malamud's characters preserve the hunger and court the downside of life out of hidden motives that they mistake for principles. They reach for their cup of sorrow.

I'm told by Japanese friends that Malamud translates better than other Jewish writers and has a larger audience in Japan than Bellow. I can't testify to the truth of that but I think it plausible. So much of Bellow's power springs from his linguistic virtuosity, whereas Malamud's is rather subterranean and prelinguistic and pressed into images rather than words, Jewbirds rather than Herzogs. As that suggests, these stories are, at their best, symbols of hidden things which have the power, much like myth, to spread wide ripples from very small disturbances. To paraphrase Gide, we should not understand them too quickly.

**MARK SHECHNER**

## ERIKSON'S IDENTITY

**THE LIFE CYCLE COMPLETED: A REVIEW. By Erik Erikson.** W. W. Norton & Company. $10.95.

Anna Freud and Erik Erikson both wrote introductory essays for *The Course of Life: Psychoanalytic Contributions Toward Understanding Personality,* a prestigious three volume series edited by Stanley I. Greenspan and George H. Pollock and published by the National Institute of Mental Health. The series set out to demonstrate that psychoanalytic theory was sufficiently broad to be considered a comprehensive developmental psychology. The essays by Freud and Erikson were intended to provide both the historical point of departure and the intellectual framework for an integration between the

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traditional psychoanalytic focus on the vicissitudes of drives and conflicts and the cognitive and developmental psychological points of views.

I assume that the invitation to lead off this series, along with Anna Freud, was meaningful to Erikson, whose standing as a psychoanalytic theoretician within the profession remains ambiguous. Even so, it is unclear why he chose to extend that essay and publish it separately as a monograph, the one here under review. As he himself remarks ". . . to restate at such length what theoretical considerations one has advanced in a lifetime and in a variety of data-filled contexts may seem to be an unrewarding task both to writer and reader alike." Because the monograph is a summary, it cannot be examined without reference to his overall contributions.

Erikson's achievements are many and well known. They include his recognition that psychoanalysis must be integrated with the social sciences, his attempt at the formulation of an epigenetic development of the ego, his extension of the stages of development throughout the life cycle with particular emphasis on the importance of adolescent development, his concepts of identity formation and identity diffusion, and his insight into the meaning of play and toys and their significance for child analysis.

Yet any overall appraisal of Erikson's contributions is inherently difficult because of their breadth, imaginativeness, and unevenness. Erikson's reputation in popular culture is largely undiminished: he is the acknowledged progenitor of psychohistory; his work on toys and play is frequently cited in the child analytic literature; and he is the source of the current preoccupation with adult stages and normative life crises. Moreover, he has popularized a number of developmental issues that have become part of the vocabulary of every educated person ("moratorium" and "identity crisis," for example). Yet his work has remained largely evocative, informed by the precise detail and the intuitive leap while failing to transform insight into a logically convincing argument or coherent theoretical statement. As a consequence, his reputation in the psychoanalytic community has substantially declined.

Nonetheless, it seems that Erikson sees himself as a major psychoanalytic theorist and wishes to be remembered as such. Judging him in this light, one must look closely at both his scheme of psychosocial development and his concepts about identity formation, since it is with these that his reputation as a theorist will ultimately stand or fall.

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From early on, Erikson appeared to be concerned about his place in the development of psychoanalytic theory. David Rapaport, in his introduction to Erikson's *Identity and the Life Cycle,* explicitly attempted to insure him a "firm place in ego psychology." According to Rapaport, until the 1930s, ". . . the psychosocial implications of reality and object relations remained unexplained theoretically." By the 1930s, that omission in theory was so evident that there were several simultaneous attempts to fill it. Rapaport favored those proposed by Erikson, Hartmann, Kris, and Lowenstein because he believed they showed an awareness of pre-existing roots in psychoanalytic theory. He felt that other attempts, such as those by Horney, Kardiner, and Sullivan, showed no such awareness. Put another way, Rapaport favored those which appeared to preserve libido theory. And he favored Erikson over Hartmann because Hartmann's theory of adaptation failed to provide a specific psychosocial theory. In contrast, Erikson focused his account of the epigenesis of ego on a theory of reality relationships.

Erikson outlined the sequence of phases of psychosocial development and attempted to relate them to psychosexual development, thereby laying the groundwork for the study of what he called "ego epigenesis." The sequences of psychosocial development he proposed were intended to parallel those of libidinal development; however, they were said to extend beyond the resolution of the Oedipal complex and span the entire life cycle. Erikson proposed that each phase of the life cycle was characterized by a phase-specific developmental task which had to be solved during that period. He described each phase in terms of either a successful or unsuccessful resolution. The dialectics in Erickson's epigenetic scheme are described in eight stages: basic trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus identity diffusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair.

While acknowledging Erikson's insight into the importance of ego development and emphasizing the necessity of a developmental theory, subsequent investigators and theorists have pointed out the ambiguous status of Erikson's developmental scheme. There are three major critiques.

First, although he has developed an interesting set of paired terms to describe presumed sequential struggles in development, they are far from compelling. He has never systematically revealed the observations from which his propositions derive. Put simply, Erikson's stages are not clearly based on empirical formulations.

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Second, his model is not only descriptive (if it is descriptive at all) but also prescriptive. As pointed out by Piaget some years ago, any scheme of development depends on an a priori assumption of maturity (or the end point of development); developmental theory does not derive from ongoing observations without that end point in mind. Ironically, given the importance Erikson accords the historical moment, he makes no allowance in his scheme to encompass different pairs of terms in different historical circumstances. He has been doubly criticized, then, on the one hand, for artificially contriving his dialectical pairs to make them congruent with Freud's model of psychosexual development and, on the other, for grafting a moralistic culturally-historically biased view of human development onto his schema.

Third, as pointed out by Loevinger, ". . . he does not stress the extent to which the sequences are separable and independently variable." So, for example, it is not at all clear that basic trust is definitively achieved in the first stage; basic trust can be taken as the end product of a separate developmental line, as can autonomy, initiative, industry, and so on. Consequently, many theorists find the concept of developmental lines more useful than the concept of ego stages. (It is Anna Freud who has most systematically introduced the idea of developmental lines into psychoanalytic thinking.)

While Rapaport strove to give Erikson a firm place in the history of ego psychology, Edith Jacobson, in her influential work *The Self and the Object World,* might be viewed as giving the *coup de grace* to that attempt. She criticized both Eissler and Erikson for relegating identity formation to adolescence, thereby underemphasizing the infantile stages of identity formation. She objected in particular to Erikson's statements: "The final identity . . . is superordinated to any single identification with individuals of the past" and "Identity formation . . . begins where the usefulness of identification ends." She was disturbed that Erikson so clearly disconnected identity from identifications.

Paradoxically, however, Erikson's ongoing influence in mainstream psychoanalytic theory continues to be his work on identity, not his schema of ego development. His description of identity diffusion is seminal to conceptions of borderline pathology, and his insistence that the major task of adolescence is that of finding a "stable, valued and socially supported definition of oneself" is at the core of the current spate of research about adolescence and the college years. As May suggested, every stage theorist has his favorite "Eden" and for Erikson, "It is probably that period in late adolescence when the

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air is so full of energy, idealism and identity possibilities." Most important, Erikson's focus on identity may be said to presage, and even inspire, the current interest in the various conceptions of self as distinct from conceptions of ego.

Erikson's apparent disappearance from the psychoanalytic firmament of stars may prove illusory. He was among the first to understand the need to theorize the intersection between the self and the historical moment and to focus on what has subsequently been developed as ego and self psychology. His large insights are wonderful, his attempts to reduce them to workable theories inadequate. His genius has been in identifying theoretical deficiencies and intuiting solutions, his failure in systematizing his insights. Yet, given his major insight into the concept of identity as distinct from ego and his widespread influence, I believe he has indeed secured a significant place in the intellectual history of post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

*The Life Cycle Completed,* unfortunately, cannot enhance Erikson's reputation, focusing as it does on his epigenetic scheme and minimizing his work on identity. It is not, as he claims, a fair summation of his work. But it does bring into bold relief the central problem in that body of work: its theoretical weakness when stripped of narrative and vignette.

**ETHEL S. PERSON**

## FLAUBERT VERSUS JAMES

**FLAUBERT AND HENRY JAMES: A STUDY IN CONTRASTS. By David Gervais.** The MacMillan Press. $8.95.

When James's Isabel Archer tells Henrietta Stackpole that her idea of happiness is "a swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see," her friend accuses her of speaking "like the heroine of an immoral novel." R. W. Stallman has noted that this is an allusion to *Madame Bovary.* Henrietta's comment may point up the essential difference rather than the likeness between James's self-conscious, even inhibited young woman and Emma—nothing seems more preposterous than a vision of the girl

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from Albany abandoning herself to adulterous raptures with Léon in the Hirondelle, her white hand appearing from the window to toss out her torn-up message of renunciation. That she "speaks like" Emma is only the measure of what she would not do, and renunciation is her final gesture. Yet Henrietta has identified a significant resemblance, after all. Like Emma, Isabel will submit freely and disastrously to her imaginative sense of life, will be seduced not so much by a lover as by her own dreams of romantic selfhood. Who is to say that Emma's dreams are inferior to Isabel's, since both heroines are led to fatally mistake the nature of reality? Both fail to understand the "plot" against them which is not so much the wicked contrivance of enemies as the circumstantial, destinal forces of material life, the plot, in the literary sense, of the nineteenth century realist novel in which they struggle to persist as characters.

Perhaps one cannot discuss the likeness or unlikeness of Emma Bovary and Isabel Archer without wrenching their images from all that distinguishes their respective fictions, from all that makes a work by Flaubert incommensurable with a work by James. Comparative studies of complex masterpieces are questionable enterprises, liable to false analogy, false contrast, oversimplification. But, to make such works confront one another may be a way of finding out their special qualities; they seem to ask more telling questions of each other than the critic might pose on his own. Such an expectation seems justified by the confrontation arranged by David Gervais, who places the two novels at the center of his reflections upon their authors, those two master-builders of the modern novel.

He is provoked by the recorded responses from James's side as well as by evidences of "anxiety of influence" in his fictions. It is clear that James began with an unwilling fascination with Flaubert's example, though confusing it a little with the further experiments in the direction of realism made by Flaubert's followers and associates—Zola, the de Goncourts, de Maupassant, Daudet—all of whom he personally met in the Paris of 1875. His first important essay about Flaubert (published in *French Poets and Novelists* in 1878) stated the dilemma James felt:

> To many people *Madame Bovary* will always be a hard book to read and an impossible one to enjoy. They will complain of the abuse of description, of the want of spontaneity, of the hideousness of the subject, of the dryness and coldness and cynicism of the tone. Others will continue to think it a great performance.

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> They will admit that it is not a sentimental novel, but they will claim that it may be regarded as a philosophical one; they will insist that the descriptions are extraordinary, and that beneath them there is always an idea that holds them up and carries them along.

James was really of both parties to the debate he imagined—he rebuked Flaubert for a morally repellent subject and at the same time for lack of feeling; he could not deny his astonished regard for this absolute triumph of realist technique. And, besides, the character of Emma somehow eluded his own reductive interpretation—described so minutely as she is, "from the hem of her garment to the texture of her fingernails," she remains, he admitted, a living creature. His understanding of her deepened, and, despite all his repugnance, he saw, in time, the romantic element in her characterization. In his introduction to the English translation of the novel in 1902 (he had by this time absorbed Gustave Faguet's distinction between the two Flauberts), he wrote, "Emma Bovary's adventures are a tragedy for the very reason that in a world, unsuspecting, unassisting, unconsoling, she has herself to distill the rich and the rare." But still, she was "too small an affair." He insisted that it was not possible to recognize her dreams as one's own and that one is forced to regard her from the height of her creator's own aloofness.

It is a judgment that has become standard, though everyone remembers that Flaubert said, *"Madame Bovary, c'est moi."* It would have greatly disappointed Flaubert. His *"impassibilité,"* Gervais believes, only testifies to his passionate immersion in the soul he depicts. What James failed to understand is the role of the darkly comic, the ironic, in Flaubert's conception of tragedy, though he calls the fate of Emma "tragic" in the remark quoted above. He really means "pathetic," for he denies her title to his own conception of the tragic which calls for an awakening of moral insight and heroism in the protagonist—the traditional English-Shakespearean definition. Flaubert's art is only apparently cold; it contains an irony which is "the measure of the conquest of hysteria" we feel in contemplating the true awfulness of life. "If Bovary is worth something, the book will not lack heart," Flaubert had written during its composition. "Yet to me irony seems to dominate life. . . . The comic pushed to an extreme, comedy which doesn't make you laugh and lyricism in jest. *Le Malade Imaginaire* goes more deeply into the inner world than all the Agamemnons." It is precisely this comic element that reminds us

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of our connection with Emma, that humbles us, whereas pity runs the risk of condescension and protects us from pain. In his revisions of the novel Flaubert strove to remove overt signs of authorial pity which might make us feel complacently sorry for her, as one is sorry for Balzac's Goriot. He replaced it by blunt, reticent, and exact description—and by a sense of the ridiculous. "In my third part, which will be full of farcical things, I want the reader to weep," Flaubert said. We are made to weep out of an appalling empathy. As Emma's history concludes, we see the meaning of those extraordinary descriptions of the outer world into which she has striven vainly to project herself. Only when she is dead does she merge, as Charles contemplates her dead body, with the *"entourage des choses."* Robbe-Grillet has called tragedy an attempt to bridge the gap between the self and the world, but Flaubert makes no attempt to cement the divorce, and for that very reason, says Gervais, "achieves the necessary clarity of tragic art."

It is another sympathy altogether that James asks for Isabel. With *Madame Bovary* in mind, *The Portrait of a Lady* may even, Gervais believes, strike us as a subtle evasion of the tragic. The central character, object of all regard within the novel as from outside it, is curiously inaccessible—James draws a veil over crucial scenes of her private life, but even our inside view of her consciousness is not as direct as James pretends; the narrator himself is one of the Isabel-watchers who seems to protect her, like her cousin Ralph, with a benefit of doubt, and does not expose her contradictions. James gives us hints that she suffers a symbolic American fault, the demand, as Lionel Trilling put it, for "life as pure spirit." In a well-known passage we are shown her brave assumption of the transcendental position—she will not be defined, she tells Madame Merle, by dress, by manners, by "appurtenances" of any kind. That Madame Merle has a good case in her opposition to this view is evident, but the novel does not go on to show Isabel's education, which should teach her that even Osmond "expresses" her. Her famous statement, "nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me," is, Gervais perceives, a *bovarysme,* but James does not want us to read it so.

The Flaubert-James comparison applies itself in another way to that near masterpiece, *L'Éducation Sentimentale,* which Gervais thinks justly described by the American novelist as "a sort of epic of the usual (with the Revolution of 1848 introduced as an episode) [but] an epic without air, without wings to lift it." What James misses, however, is the novel's satire. James declares his impatience

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with the "poverty of Frédéric's own inward or for that matter outward life," but his contempt for the hero, Gervais says, "is an insulation against Flaubert's irony just as his pity for Emma was an insulation against his sense of tragedy." And perhaps James is less offended by Frédéric's mediocrity than by the fact that Frédéric is what Edmund Wilson called "a perfect Henry James character"—sensitive, afraid of life, and convinced that he is above the common—and that it is for these very Jamesian qualities that Flaubert mocks him. But Frédéric *is* discredited too quickly, and this tends to discredit even his love for Madame Arnoux, so that we have the dispiriting sense of the novel's progression as a series of events in which nothing really counts more than anything else; the barricades and debates of 1848 and even love count for no more than the empty social dinners.

The work of James to be set against *L'Éducation* is his *The Princess Casamassima,* which is closer to the French model of realism-naturalism than anything else by the American novelist. Although he makes no attempt like Flaubert's to give us actual history, fabricating his imaginary anarchist conspiracy from the merest hint of such things, James actually visited a prison to get his opening scene right, took notes, and achieved a sense of the city of London and of urban types outside his usual range—Paul Muniment, for example, is more unforgettable, and somehow more representative of a radical politician than any of Flaubert's republicans. Muniment may be compared not only with Senécal but with Flaubert's Deslauriers, especially in his exploitation of his young friend—his success with Hyacinth's adored Princess may be an analogue of Deslauriers's attempted seduction of Madame Arnoux. Hyacinth Robinson, is, of course, like Frédéric, a sensitive and ineffectual personality fenced off from culture and ease by his poverty. But James's own interest in this character, his centralizing stress on Hyacinth's consciousness, gives a romantic value to everything seen through his eyes, while Flaubert denies such an authority to Frédéric.

Gervais's game of juxtapositions is subtly played; his book is a meditative exercise that examines now James, now Flaubert, and brings into the argument the comments of other critics from Sainte-Beuve to Leavis. He makes special use of the reactions of D. H. Lawrence to focus again upon the question of tragedy. Lawrence took *Madame Bovary* to be a tragic novel without tragic actors. Tragedy, Lawrence thought, ought to be "a great kick at misery," an exhibition of the spirit that vindicates itself even as determining forces crush it. Gervais is more convinced than Lawrence was that

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Emma does make such tragic gestures of defiance, even though Flaubert himself seems to want sometimes to pass off her moments of tragic exhilaration as hysteria. Her speech to Rodolph after he has spurned her appeal for help is, he insists, a lucid expression of true vision; even her impulse towards suicide in the great scene at the mansarde is an assertion of freedom as, perhaps, her actual suicide is. Less "tragic," more "determined" in a fashion Flaubert could not bear to envision, would have been her acceptance of further life.

James, Gervais believes, felt an *untragic* need to find consolation in an acceptable death like Ralph Touchett's in *A Portrait of a Lady*. It is only Flaubert whose gaze does not waver from the ultimate humiliation which all must share. The critic gives the palm, therefore, to Flaubert, in whom the tension between determinism and yearning for transcendence remains as a sort of "irate energy." "A tragedy which nearly eschews tragic conflict by making the odds against man too great was, perhaps, the truest way for tragic thought to find expression in mid-nineteenth century France," he concludes, and would also have been, he implies, the truest way for the expatriated American writing in England.

**MILLICENT BELL**

## DROPPING THE OBJECT

**PHILOSOPHY AND THE MIRROR OF NATURE. By Richard Rorty.** Princeton University Press. $20.00.
**CONSEQUENCES OF PRAGMATISM. By Richard Rorty.** University of Minnesota Press. $29.50.

For the past three and a half centuries the central element in Western philosophy has been epistemology, the theory of knowledge in which the claims of various sorts of intellectual activity to provide us with knowledge or reasonable belief are examined and judged. It began with Descartes, who, winding himself up for a metaphysics that would take account of the new science, turned what he had meant to be an entrance hall into the main livingroom. It became explicit with Locke, who described himself as concerned with "the nature, origin, extent, and certainty" of knowledge, and it reached some kind of apogee with Kant. For some time after him,

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the post-Kantian idealists, Hegel in particular, took to large-scale, speculative construction; and those who reacted against Hegel—Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche—did not do so as epistemologists. But academic philosophers in Germany joyfully heeded the cry, back to Kant, in 1865. Meanwhile, in the English-speaking world the attitude of Locke persisted, apart from the brief, late, exotic eruption of Hegelianism in the last quarter of the century. Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore started to get that under control in 1903.

The chief twentieth-century version of epistemology has been analytic philosophy, dominant so far in various modulations, in the English-speaking world and a few outposts like Poland and Sweden. Stronger stuff, indeed, soon flooded the continental European market. Although Edmund Husserl, in the first decades of the century, seemed to be in much the old line of business, his technique of phenomenology, despite his severely cognitive intentions, was soon put to more romantic, emotional uses by Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. In the last two, more or less structuralist decades, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have detonated a pyrotechnically colorful and startling assault on the whole, orderly, respectable, academic tradition in philosophy from Descartes to the neo-Kantians and beyond in both directions.

Until recently, this intellectual insurrection has manifested itself in the English-speaking world largely in literary criticism and in antipositivist social thinking. As far as philosophy is concerned, there have been some moderately puzzled reports of what has been going on but no large and intelligible endorsement until the publication of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.* This is the enthusiastic profession of faith of a convert, fully acquainted with the preoccupations of the type of philosopher he used to be. More recently he brought out a collection of essays published between 1972 and 1980, *Consequences of Pragmatism,* in which his main theme is further explored, largely through his discovery of material from a miscellaneous array of thinkers contributory to his theme.

He puts forward two main theses. One is that traditional judicial epistemology should be abandoned and replaced by an altogether less authoritarian, "conversational" style of philosophy. Its practitioners would not be detached critics of the intellectual scene, exulting in a special method of inquiry and in the special authority over other disciplines with which it ennobles them. They would be distinguished only in degree from other reflective people, by the generality of their interests. They would no longer referee the games

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but travel from one playing field to another to take part in a comradely, egalitarian spirit. Rorty sees them as "cultural critics," having in mind such socially aware students of literature as T. S. Eliot and Edmund Wilson.

His second main thesis supports this proposal by denying the objectivity and intellectual compulsiveness of the epistemologist's critical vocabulary—his notions of truth, rationality, and knowledge. Truth is not a matter of correspondence between beliefs and the world conceived as something independent of those beliefs. In knowledge, the mind is not a mirror that reflects the intrinsic articulation of the world outside it. Truth, as the pragmatists William James and John Dewey maintained, is whatever it suits our serious, long-run purposes to believe, the "we" here being society, or its thinking portion, as a whole, at the present time at least, since mankind's purposes vary historically. (If so, why should they not vary geographically as well?)

Rorty's anti-objectivism about truth and knowledge is argued for with considerable elaboration of detail. Large tracts of recent analytic philosophy are drawn upon from the work of W. O. Quine, Wilfred Sellars, and Donald Davidson. Thomas Kuhn and other critics of the idea of science as a linear accumulation of ever more systematic knowledge of the world by a unitary scientific method are invoked. Dewey is called on for his idea that the knower is not a passive spectator but an active manipulator of the world, the later Wittgenstein for the idea that our intellectual practices have no firmer foundation than the prevalence of a social convention to follow them.

Social agreement is the nearest we can get to the imaginary objectivity of the epistemological tradition, and it is temporary. Rorty is close here to Foucault's notion of the history of thought as a sequence of incommensurable *epistemes* or, for that matter, R. G. Collingwood's historicist doctrine of successive systems of "absolute presuppositions." Rorty shares Collingwood's conviction that there are no eternal problems in philosophy, and we must, he says, put mind, knowledge, and philosophy "back into history."

It is often said that old philosophies do not die but simply fade away as new philosophers, changing the subject, ignore them. Rorty's conversational proposal, however, does not simply set up shop on its own; it attacks the epistemology it seeks to replace with that style of philosophy's own weapons. Rorty sees that it would be more congruous or apt or fitting (one hardly likes to say consistent) for con-

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versationalism to go for its predecessor with mockery and satire—which Kierkegaard used on Hegel and which Rorty praises the later Wittgenstein for using on epistemology. If one were to raise the objection of inconsistency to Rorty, he might reply that he is not to be intimidated by that epistemological fetish. But even conversation must submit to some constraints if it is to be more than disconnected interior monologue. Rorty, furthermore, is not as antinomian as he seems. So it is more likely that he would reply that his is an *argumentum ad hominem,* undermining the assumptions of epistemology with forms of reasoning epistemologists accept.

The main line of argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is that epistemology, conceived as the nonempirical science of the mind's activity of representing nature to itself, is open to fatal objections. In the book's first part, in which a thickly woven hedge of up-to-date controversy in the (analytic) philosophy of mind may impede the forward progress of the general reader, the conclusion is drawn that the mind-body distinction is historically unstable and is continually being redrawn as different philosophical interests occupy its drawers. But that distinction is not necessary to or presupposed by epistemology and is at most loosely related to it in various ways. All epistemology needs is that there should be things that have beliefs and that an important property of some of these beliefs is truth, understood as a relation between the beliefs that possess it and the world outside them. The beliefs do not have to be conceived as abstract propositions or their believers as inscrutable Cartesian consciousnesses. Epistemology is an entirely intelligible activity for materialists. So this part of the argument is beside the point.

Although Rorty does not go in much for the satire he in principle regards as appropriate, he allows himself a fair measure of rhetoric. His critique of what he mistakenly believes to be the mentalistic presuppositions of epistemology, with its persistent references to *mirroring* (as in the book's title), to *representation,* to *"man's glassy essence"* (the title of part one) is calculated to saddle all epistemology with the indefensible and literally pictorial account of belief given by Locke and his eighteenth-century successors. But epistemology can survive, and has for quite a long time survived, the replacement of pictures in the mind's eye by less naive conceptions of belief, such as dispositions to utter sentences and, in suitably practical cases, to act in certain ways.

At the heart of Rorty's attacks on the idea that the truth of beliefs is ever determined by the world outside them is a familiar

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dissatisfaction caused by the uninformativeness of correspondence theories of truth. Alfred Tarski's formula, "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white," introduces the belief-verifying fact only in the conceptually polluted terms we use to express the belief in question. It fails, people feel, to refer to the fact as it is in itself, independent of our way of articulating the world in discourse. That is hardly surprising; a theory is a conceptual and so essentially linguistic thing. We cannot get a fact into it except in linguistic clothing. But there is a conceptually hygienic kind of way of bringing words and the world together, as when we teach someone the elementary vocabulary of factual description. We teach someone to come out (or be ready to come out) with "this is white" by uttering it in circumstances in which something white is salient. The learner's attention is directed to a chunk of the perceivable environment, that is, so far as he is concerned, conceptually unravished. If he catches on to the socially prevailing practice of applying "white" to things, we have reason to conclude that the same feature of the world determines his use of the word, by way of its effect on his sense organs, as determines ours.

Rorty writes rhetorically of the correspondence theorist's conception of our being *compelled* by the world to form certain beliefs, in the spirit of a hearty parent who thinks one should be outdoors doing something, not skulking inside in front of the television. This is like the naive liberationism that sees logic as an instrument of bourgeois repression, a fantasy of infantile omnipotence dressed up as a theory. It draws on the same ideological animus as his egalitarian condemnation of epistemologists for supposing themselves to be a rational elite. In fact, much current epistemology denies that the world forces any beliefs on us. Sharing the fallibilist point of view of Charles Sanders Peirce, the first, greatest, but, according to Rorty, overrated, pragmatist, it maintains that the world, at most, more or less strongly inclines us to form certain beliefs, which must then be reconciled with other beliefs of the same sort and with the theories we have developed from them.

In such a big book it is curious how little Rorty has to say about the specific consequences of his proposal apart from the reemployment of epistemologists. On the one hand, he says, in the first essay of *Consequences of Pragmatism,* that in fact "the number of beliefs that changed among the educated classes of Europe between the thirteenth and the nineteenth centuries is ridiculously small compared to the number that remained intact." That suggests that the cognitive mystery ride he is inviting us to join him on is really com-

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pletely safe and that the children can be brought along. On the other hand, he announces his solidarity with dervishes like Foucault and Derrida who would vehemently reject the spirit of Rorty's unmanageably vague remark about the rate of change of beliefs (how does one count beliefs?) In its Deweyan, American version his proposal is edifying and progressive; in its French version it is something much rougher and wilder.

One can suspect that the Frenchmen have taken his proposal seriously while he is just playing with it. He wants philosophy to be assimilated to cultural criticism, as exemplified by T. S. Eliot and Edmund Wilson. But why stop with fuddy-duddies like that? Eliot was a theologian; Wilson accorded a positivistic place of honor to science; they respectively succumbed to the two great intellectual errors for which, according to Rorty, epistemology is responsible.

The rhetoric of Rorty's notion of the epistemologist's method and of the claim to authority he makes for the results of its application should be dispelled. His picture of a self-appointed elite, claiming a special authority because of the use of a special method suggests a kind of ancient Egyptian priesthood practicing secret rites and emerging with oracular judgements from the obscure depths of their temples. In fact, epistemologists set themselves to the task of making explicit the assumptions and logical relationships of the bodies of thought they examine. They do not merely describe what they investigate—the professed activity of the later Wittgenstein. Nor do they dogmatically promulgate brand new rules of thought of their own manufacture. They attempt to assess beliefs by attentive consideration of their conformity with what almost everyone accepts most of the time and after reflection, particularly in fields that are of close practical concern. Anyone with time and the taste for it can learn how the thing is done. The results and the path to them are open to view. To return to an earlier comparison, epistemologists are not Egyptian priests but football referees who apply and interpret rules which the players they judge know perfectly well, even if they cannot state them properly and, in the heat of the game, may find it hard to abide by.

Confronted by the showy effusions of Foucault and Derrida, one wonders what they would make of a lawyer who represented them, or a surgeon who explained how he was about to operate on them, or an accountant who explained their tax returns in the intellectual style they employ. The theorization of these French philosophers, including its heavy political constituent, is frivolous be-

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cause wholly disconnected from real life, as distinct from the chatter of lecture rooms and cafés. Their thinking is not motivated by wonder or the desire to know but by the desire to amaze, to be known. There is at least an old-fashioned consistency between the view that philosophy is no more objective than fashion and their mannequinlike posturings. It is still a rather vulgar form of intellectual decadence.

That criticism does not apply to Rorty, who does no more than dip a fraternal, exploratory toe into such turbid waters. His patriotic devotion to James and Dewey enables him to deny the objectivity of truth, rationality, and knowledge without any large or clear effect on anything outside philosophy itself. He is entertaining about the professional anxiety of analytic philosophers in the face of possible technological superannuation. One can imagine imported French material being resisted with the cry, "How can we set and grade examinations on this stuff?" There is nothing in Rorty to make them lie awake at night. Confined almost entirely to topics and modes of reasoning with which they are at home, his thought, as so far expressed, affirms only that there ought to be a revolution in philosophy and why. Its specific consequences, apart from fairly gestural references to conversation and cultural criticism, are left wide open.

**ANTHONY QUINTON**

## THE ANALYTIC TRIANGLE

**A SECRET SYMMETRY: SABINA SPIELREIN BETWEEN JUNG AND FREUD. Edited by Aldo Carotenuto.** Pantheon. $17.50.

Aldo Carotenuto, a Jungian analyst and professor of psychology at the University of Rome, was presented in 1977 with a fascinating batch of unpublished material discovered in Geneva at the Institute of Psychology. They had been left behind by Sabina Spielrein, a forgotten and rather remarkable personality in the psychoanalytic movement. In addition to a forty-one page diary written from 1909 to 1912, there were triangular exchanges between Spielrein, Jung, and Freud. Specifically, there were forty-six letters from Jung to Spielrein (which the Jung estate refused authorization to publish), twelve letters from Spielrein to Jung, twenty letters from

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Freud to Spielrein, and two letters (or drafts) from Spielrein to Freud.

In *A Secret Symmetry,* Carotenuto presents the documents in superb translations and then narrates Spielrein's life and times, weaving in her theoretical writings with a linear account of her psychoanalytic and cultural milieu. Carotenuto writes from the perspective of analytic psychology. While much of his exposition is valuable, I find his interpretative passages unconvincing, tendentious, and regrettably off target. When his language is not plainly presumptuous, it is often apologetic for Jung and his transparently indecent behavior. For me, the primary documents are more compelling than the accompanying essay.

The great discovery in this text is Spielrein herself. And what a magnificent person she was! On first encounter, one is struck by her versatility and her ecumenical interests, her probing doubt and poignant self-doubt. I was impressed by her self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness, her capacity for continuous emotional and intellectual growth. This sensitive soul with slightly mystical and neoromantic tendencies transcended her own, quite deep-seated, psychological disturbances in an imaginative, altogether singular fashion. A vibrant personality who possessed a rare blend of artistic intuition, scientific rigor, and theoretical originality, Spielrein belongs to that generation of brilliant and willful women who were committed to psychoanalysis because it sprang from the depths of their own being. Psychoanalysis became her life, her calling, her bridge to the past and to the future. Her scientific work complemented her scholarly investigations of folklore, mythology, the psychology of religion, music, art history, and that frontier region where language and psychoanalysis intersect. Her inventiveness, intellectual audacity, devotion to research, psychological perspicacity, and ability to survive a tumultuous ordeal and to generate fertile ideas, all seem exceptional.

But she was not a character in a novel. Born in 1885 in Rostov-on-Don, the eldest child and only surviving daughter in a family with three brothers (a younger sister had died), Spielrein came from the cultivated, Russian Jewish bourgeoisie—a bourgeoisie educationally conscious and oriented toward Europe. Her grandfather and great-grandfather had been rabbis. Spielrein's early childhood was marked by painful, extended episodes of feces retention, often lasting two weeks. She recurrently fantasized about defecating on her father, and she feared soiling herself. (Curiously, her name translates as

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"clean play" in German.) Spielrein masturbated compulsively and expressed wildly ambivalent feelings for the people in her life. She was periodically depressed; her suicidal thoughts alternated with uncontrollable bouts of laughing, weeping, and screaming. In 1904, at age 20, she was brought by her parents to the Burghölzli mental hospital in Zurich—an institution known for its treatment of severe psychic disorders. Her physician was Jung. Jung apparently treated her according to Freud's methods. He diagnosed her illness as severe hysteria, or as he put it to Freud, "psychotic hysteria." (Bruno Bettelheim, in a recent essay in the *New York Review of Books,* argues that she was schizoid and probably experienced one or more schizophrenic episodes.) In 1905, Spielrein had recovered sufficiently to enter the University of Zurich to study medicine. In 1911, after writing her thesis on "The Psychological Content of a Case of Schizophrenia," she became a doctor with a specialty in psychiatry.

In 1912, Spielrein published a seminal paper entitled "Destruction as a Cause of Coming into Being." Written in German, it appeared in the *Yearbook for Psychoanalysis and Psychopathological Research.* The paper was a daring inquiry into the death instinct, anticipating by eight years Freud's discussion of the same subject in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Several of Spielrein's insights anticipated the findings of existential psychoanalysis in the 1930s and 1940s. From October 1911 to November 1912 she was in Vienna and became closely associated with Freud's circle and the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. For a time she lived in Berlin. In 1913 she married Dr. Paul Scheftel. While little is recorded about the marriage, we do know that her daughter, Renate, was born in September 1913.

From 1914 until 1923, Spielrein became the proverbial wandering Jew, practicing psychoanalysis in Swiss cities such as Lausanne, Châteaux d'Oex, and Geneva. For eight months in 1921 she analyzed the great cognitive psychologist, Jean Piaget. Possibly under his influence, she published a paper in 1922 called "Consideration of Various Stages of Linguistic Development: The Origins of the Childish Words Papa and Mama." Here she attempted to integrate semantic and perceptual approaches to the mind within a psychoanalytic conceptual frame. Passages from her papers reveal her incisive grasp of issues—the breast and the baby's activity of sucking at the mother's breast, the centrality of language in the psychoanalytic dialogue, and the role of otherness in the unconscious—which Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan would subsequently highlight in their theoretical projects. Spielrein was a forerunner, a powerful, germinal thinker.

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In 1923, and clearly out of sympathy for the revolution under way in the Soviet Union (Lenin was still alive, though gravely ill; Stalin had not yet emerged as his successor nor consolidated his power), Spielrein, with Freud's blessing, returned home to Rostov-on-Don. She became involved in the Russian psychoanalytic movement, participating in a research endeavor on psychoanalytic pedagogy. She helped to design a special home for infants and children combining psychoanalytic views of sexual education and early childhood development with a socialist environmentalism and commitment to humanization of the community. Her last paper, dated 1931, focused on children's drawings, comparing those executed with eyes open and those with eyes closed. The metaphor of seeing and non-seeing may indicate her frustration with the practical attempt to synthesize the ideas of Marx and Freud. In 1936 the Communist Party outlawed psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union. Spielrein probably died in Stalin's purges in 1937. She left behind some thirty papers.

Spielrein's diary and letters reveal that the Jung/Spielrein connection exceeded the boundary and propriety of the patient-physician relationship. All the available evidence suggests a passionate love affair, almost certainly one that was consummated sexually. Jung was Spielrein's first love. He came to represent not only that indispensable person who had "cured" her, but also her savior, rescuer, and personal charismatic hero. She collaborated with him in his early papers on association and shared many of his ideas. Jung confided to her his own dreams during her therapeutic sessions, requested that she read his intimate journal, and invited her to meet his wife and children. Since Jung's letters remain unpublished, we can only guess at the motives of his heirs. Cover-up seems likely. The love affair with Spielrein clearly threatened Jung's professional career. It decisively changed Freud's opinion of him.

While it is impossible to date the precise beginnings of the affair, it became public knowledge in 1909. In all probability Emma Jung, Jung's wife, wrote to Spielrein's mother in Russia bringing the salient facts out in the open. Soon after, Spielrein wrote to Freud informing him of the matter and requesting his advice and intercession. Jung then wrote a self-serving and malicious letter to Spielrein's mother, rationalizing his behavior on the grounds that he was not paid a fee for his services. Payment, according to Jung's logic, and not some other moral or professional code, is what guaranteed an analyst's integrity, restraint, and respect for his patient. Instead of taking responsibility for his breach of clinical ethics, Jung claimed

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that money was the real issue, and he urged Spielrein's mother to compensate him for his services. After reading this letter and hearing Jung's corroboration of Spielrein's version, Freud revised his earlier opinions of both Spielrein and Jung, the latter his chosen successor. Freud stated that he had been "wrong" in automatically siding with Jung, "wrong" in misconstruing the facts to Spielrein's disadvantage, and that he was now pleased with Spielrein's maturity in resolving the disturbing intimacy with Jung.

Yet, Spielrein resolved her conflict with Jung in her own peculiar fashion. She stepped "between" Jung and Freud, that is, she became the self-appointed intermediary, attempting to reconcile their two systems and promoting a rapprochement between the estranged thinkers after their 1913 split.

Jung himself admitted being a scoundrel and a knave. Spielrein called him a "No-good." She felt used and abused by him, desiring to "forgive him or murder him." On one occasion she smacked Jung in the face, while threatening him with a knife. Carotenuto refers to Jung's behavior as a betrayal. He intimates that Jung may have been incapable of loving, that he had marked paranoid tendencies, and that he was opportunistically concerned with his professional reputation. Technically, he explains Jung's amorous involvement with his patient in terms of "psychotic countertransference," alleging that the analyst's emotional reaction to Spielrein triggered some "psychotic nuclei" in him. In other passages, nonetheless, Carotenuto attributes Jung's behavior to youth, inexperience, bad taste, exuberance, even to his intuitive faculties. The account of Jung's irresistibility to women is circular: women found him "seductive" because of Jung's supposed "feminine" nature. By implication, Carotenuto persuades us to forgive Jung, to remain conscious of fifty years of solid and creative contributions, and always to remember Freud's immature blindspots. Carotenuto repeatedly and invidiously compares the Spielrein affair with Freud's infatuation with cocaine, but his analogies work against holding Jung accountable for his actions.

To vilify Jung with accusations of bad faith is one thing, to offer a critical analysis is quite another. The documents reveal that the Spielrein matter came to light at a critical historical conjuncture when relations between Freud and Jung began to deteriorate. Without rehearsing the complex reasons for the Freud-Jung split, we need to be aware that personal and theoretical differences converged to produce the rupture.

We know that Freud's Jewishness, the so-called "Jewish ques-

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tion," always operated in Freud's relations with Jung. Jung appeared an excellent choice to succeed Freud because he was a respectable Gentile. That is, Freud felt that this son of a Protestant Swiss pastor would help bring psychoanalysis a measure of legitimacy in the Christian world and visibility in the psychiatric universe. Under Jung's guidance, Freud hoped, psychoanalysis would exit from its ghetto-like seclusion, overcome its taint of Jewishness, and hence become more widely diffused in medical and scientific circles. In short, resistance to the theory would not center around the Jewishness of the theory's founder and its chief practitioners.

After the rupture with Freud, Jung characterized psychoanalysis as a "Jewish psychology." There is abundant, and, I think, irrefutable evidence that Jung made anti-Jewish and pro-Nazi statements during the era of the Third Reich, asserting, for example, that the Jewish unconscious lacked the vitality, universalism, rootedness, and creative depths of the Germanic people. From 1934 to 1940, Jung served as editor of the National Socialist controlled *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie,* writing inflammatory letters against the "corrosive" nature of the Jewish point of view in psychology and castigating Freud for his "soulless materialism." The Spielrein documents illustrate that Jung's anti-Semitism played a critical and dissolving role in the Freud-Jung relationship long before Hitler entered the historical stage.

As a non-Jewish Jew who came into consciousness in anti-Semitic Vienna, Freud's Jewishness was an integral part of his subjective and professional identity. While not observing Jewish rites, or harboring any form of Jewish nationalism, Freud never denied his Jewishness, never opted for strategies of assimilation. Nor did he accept the anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews that pervaded many stratas of Viennese society and culture, including the university. For him Jewishness was a metaphor for pride, for thinking rigorously and independently. In brief, being Jewish allowed Freud to think against himself and to risk thinking against the scientific and moral biases of his contemporaries. He also associated Jewishness with a vague kind of "ethical" consciousness, a commitment to honesty in human relations, to candor in the practice of psychoanalysis. Jewishness, lastly, provided Freud with a limited sense of community and fraternity; despite his unpopularity and isolation, certain Jewish colleagues made him feel welcome, understood, and at home.

During her liaison with Jung, Spielrein had a recurring fantasy of bearing Jung a son. She named the boy child Siegfried, picturing

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him to be some kind of Wagnerian hero, an Aryan conqueror. Siegfried would be the visible sign of the Jung-Spielrein union, the living symbol unifying the Aryan and Jewish souls. Siegfried also got into the latent content of Spielrein's dreams. From a Jungian slant, the dream could be interpreted to mean that the great Aryan-Semitic hero might affectuate a lasting bond between Jung's typologies, his interests in parapsychology and the occult and Freud's libido theory and his more empirically based science.

Carotenuto quotes a fragment of a letter from Jung to Spielrein, dated September 1911, in which Jung stiffly and didactically advises his pupil how to court Freud in order to win his favor. I find the advice mocking and contemptuous of Freud: "Approach him as a great master and rabbi, and all will be well." Spielrein took issue with several of Jung's anti-Jewish accusations in January 1918. As a Russian Jew with a rabbinical heritage, Spielrein was aware of the rich Jewish mystical and messianic tradition. She pointed out to Jung that Jewish spiritual life had existed for centuries and that it still existed; she also was upset by Jung's repetition of the old adage that the Jews were historically responsible for the murder of Christ. In defense of Freud, she asserted that Freud did not reduce all of man's activity to primitive instinctual wishes; nor did Freud's theories denigrate man's higher cultural accomplishments, simply because he understood the roots of culture in the repression and sublimation of primitive urgings.

To be sure, Freud reacted more negatively to the Siegfried fantasy than did Jung. He instructed Spielrein to break her dependency on Jung by coming to Vienna and by entering into analysis with him. Even after her marriage, Freud thought Spielrein remained pathologically attached to Jung. This suggested self-hatred on her part, a masochistic identification with her anti-Semitic aggressor. Freud repeatedly referred to Jung in the letters to Spielrein as her "Germanic hero," with his Aryan posturings and racial arrogance, and he invited Spielrein to make the same choice that he had made: "I imagine that you love Dr. J. so deeply still because you have not brought to light the hatred that he merits."

Despite Freud's words, Spielrein clung to her ideas about generating a Siegfried. Upon learning of Spielrein's pregnancy, Freud attempted to shatter her Wagnerian phantasm with irony: "I am, as you know, cured of the last shred of my predilection for the Aryan cause and would like to take it that if the child turns out to be a boy, he will develop into a stalwart Zionist." As a psychoanalyst

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and as a Jew, Freud was convinced that one had to recognize and ultimately to sever ties with one's anti-Jewish enemies—such as Jung who belonged there characterologically—and was unable to respond to scientific or logical reasoning. The Spielrein correspondence is only one place where Freud denounced Jung's anti-Semitism. He once accused him of "lies, brutality, and anti-Semitic condescension towards me." Mixing bitterness, resignation, and realism, Freud did not mince his words to Spielrein: "We are and remain Jews. The others will only exploit us and will never understand or appreciate us."

After the birth of Spielrein's daughter, Freud wrote to her, "Now we can think again about the blond Siegfried and perhaps smash the idol before his time comes." It is not implausible to read in Freud's last letter to Spielrein, dated February 9, 1923, "Lastly, you will be on home ground," support of her move to Russia and tacit approval of her return to her Jewish origins. Just as returning to Russia may have represented a way of liberating herself from her idealization of Jung, so it may have been her subjective way of accepting her Eastern European Jewish roots, culture, and environment.

Regarding splits, Freud took the position that in most instances reconciliation was unproductive. Adversaries had to be so designated, diluters had to be opposed, crude misinterpreters had to be jettisoned or at least labeled popularizers or vulgarizers. Freud's originality as a thinker, his strength as the founder of an international movement, consisted partly in his ability to name and define. He was against mediators who blurred essential differences.

Spielrein, however, attempted to fuse opposites and to discount specificity in order to achieve a union of psychological theories and techniques of analysis. Her strivings for integration may have derived from her inability to accept endings, her incapacity to tolerate separation. Equally important, however, was her need for affirmation. To counter the destructiveness she encountered, to offset Jung's personal sadism toward her, to balance the cruel sexual attraction of the anti-Semitic Jung to the beautiful and brilliant Jewess, to reverse the violation of their clinical and professional relationship, she created mythical linkages, ecumenical visions that nullified contradictions. She became fascinated by the symmetries between Jung and Freud and disregarded the asymmetries. In the process she invented a language of harmony and unity.

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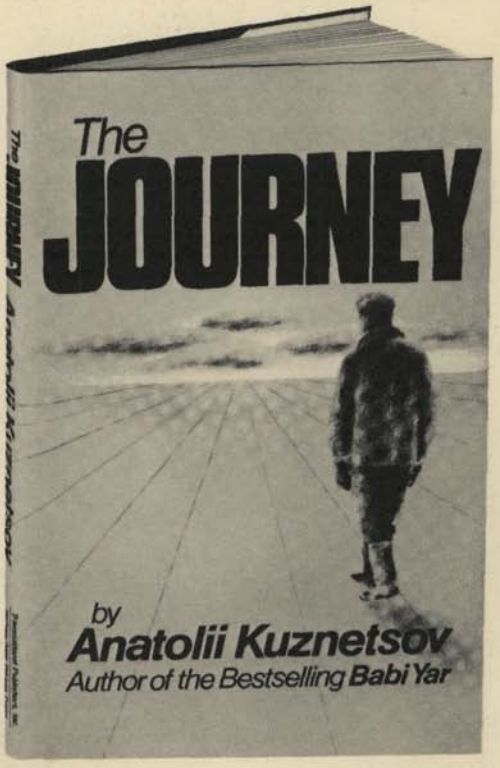


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